

Ph.D. Thesis

Byzantium and the Black Sea, c. 1000- 1204

Royal Holloway, University of London

Jack Sheard
25-11-2021

Declaration of Authorship

I, Jack Sheard, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Jack Sheard

Date: 02-06-21

Abstract

This thesis will argue that the Black Sea of the High Medieval period was an important and vibrant economic zone. During the two centuries before the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade in 1204, the Black Sea was bustling with economic activity. Not only did those dwelling on its coasts – the Byzantines, Russians, Georgians and later Seljuqs – make use of the maritime connections for local trade; but its markets also connected those further afield, across the Mediterranean and European worlds. As a result of its substantial commercial activity, and geopolitical import, the Black Sea figured significantly in Byzantine foreign policy; however, the Byzantines did not attempt to systematically close the sea off to foreign merchants, as has been suggested. Rather, they used it as a bargaining chip in their negotiations with the Italian merchant republics of Genoa and Venice. Due to the later flourishing of the Black Sea under the *Pax Mongolica*, historiography has tended to underestimate or dismiss this earlier period of Euxine activity; however, such side-lining of this earlier trade is based on mistaken premises or misevaluated sources. In all, the Black Sea was a substantial economic zone in its own right long before 1204, and deserves more thorough investigation than it has been given. This thesis will provide that examination.

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Preface: Journal of the Plague Years

The latter portions of the research for and preparation of this thesis were conducted during the events of the Coronavirus Pandemic which began in late 2019. In so far as is possible, steps have been taken to mitigate the effects of governmental restrictions upon this work; however, it is necessary to note that the limitations of access to, and often outright closure of libraries which took place during this period, affected my access to sources. On rare occasions, it has been necessary to use older and potentially less accurate versions of primary material, when more current editions were not accessible; in light of easing restrictions, these references have been revised afterwards; however, this was not always possible.

Another difficulty this thesis has faced is a number of language barriers. I have found it necessary to draw on sources in a range of languages: French, German and Italian, as commonly-used languages of academic publication, and also a wide selection of Russian works, as to be expected, given the region's proximity to Russia. However, also found in the bibliography are secondary works in Swedish and Polish. I am, naturally, not fluent in all (or even most) of these languages; however, this has proven to be less of a problem than might have been anticipated. Modern technology has provided some solutions, enabling basic, computer-aided translations for a range of materials. Where appropriate, this has been supplemented with human assistance from native speakers in the various languages. As a result, this thesis has been able to use a much wider range of documents, both primary and secondary, than would have been available to me even half a decade ago.

However, not all documents were susceptible to such computerised solutions. The unique, serpentine calligraphy of the Georgian alphabet does not lend itself to automated translation; nor did I have contacts able to translate it for me. Thus, for Georgian sources alone, I was forced to rely almost solely upon already-translated works, with only small extracts from the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* being examined

in the original, with the assistance of a native speaker, where understanding of the precise nuances of certain verbs and prepositions were necessary for precision of argument.

On such a note, I would like to acknowledge the many people who have helped me produce this work, without whom this thesis would not only have suffered immensely, but would most likely not have existed at all. Foremost among these is my supervisor, Professor Harris, whose assistance throughout this process has been excellent. His knowledge of Byzantine (both with a capital 'B', and without) lore, as well as historical criticism, has been peerless, and his personal support has been extraordinarily generous, and I am deeply indebted to him for his assistance. Thanks are also due to my parents, who served both as captive proof-readers and (despite my repeated discouragements) voluntary researchers. In addition, I must also thank my numerous translators, Mary, Samia, Krzysztof and many others, whose contributions are sprinkled throughout, as well as my 'scientific advisors', Clive and Derek, whose insights into the chemistry were essential for the development of my argument in chapter two.

Finally, I would like to thank my dogs, who have patiently sat and listened as I read, re-read, revised and re-revised this thesis while they acted as mute but loyal sounding-boards over a period of years. The fact that two of the four of them did not survive this process, is, I hope, not a reflection on the work itself.

*Jack Sheard
Worlingworth, Suffolk
May 2021*

1. Introduction: The Byzantine Black Sea?

The Bosphorus¹ has created both a geological and historiographical separation of the Black Sea from the wider Mediterranean. Rather than integrating it within larger historical trends and patterns, the tendency has been for historians to isolate the Black Sea, and treat it as a separate, independent body, with little connection to the broader world. However, this thesis will show that such a conception of the Black Sea is inaccurate. During the two centuries prior to the Fall of Constantinople in 1204, the Euxine² was involved in much larger economic spheres – Mediterranean, Baltic, Caucasian and even trans-continental trading patterns. Moreover, the Sea's economic importance caused it to be a significant component of Byzantine foreign policy.³ Despite such prospects, however, this earlier part of the Black Sea's history have been overlooked by historians, who instead focus on the Black Sea's 'more exciting' period in the 13th century when, thanks to the 'Pax Mongolica', it became "the

¹ The inclusion of an 'h' is intentional and necessary, to avoid confusion with the similarly-named location near the straits of Kerch, which forms an integral part of the discussion in Chapter 1. Whilst the original Greek name for the straits, Βόσπορος, contains no h or phi, the misspelling 'Bosphoros', 'Bosforos', or similar variations, becomes commonplace (particularly in Latin texts) during the period under discussion in this thesis. One excellent demonstration comes from the *Chiliades* of Ioannes Tzetzes, who draws attention to the same distinction as I have: "Δύο δ'είσιν οἱ Βόσποροι, καὶ μάθε τίνας οὗτοι: / Ὁ Σκύθης ὁ Κιμμέριος, δι'οὔ Μαιώτις λίμνη.... Ὁ παρ' ἡμῖν τε θράκιος, ὁ καὶ Ἑλλησποντίας / Ὅς συνηθεία τῇ κοινῇ προσφόριον καλεῖται." – "There are two Bosporos, learn now where they are: The Scythian Kimmerios, which is the mouth of the Maiotis... and our Thracian one, also the Hellespont, which is called by custom 'Prosphorios'." Ioannes Tzetzes, *Historium Variarum Chil-iades*, ed. Theophilus Kiessling (Leipzig: Vogel, 1826), 35, Bk. 1, l. 832-6.

Most likely this change simply came around from the usual form of lenition and sound changes which take place in all languages over time. Nonetheless, this 'misspelling' is sometimes said to originate with the Roman author Marcus Terentius Varro, *Rerum Rusticarum*; however, the textual tradition is unclear, with some editors (e.g. In the Pagani edition) rendering it as 'Bosphorum', and others (such as in the Loeb edition) as 'Bosporum'. Examination of the manuscript(s) would be necessary before definitively attributing the neologism to Varro. Marcus Terentius Varro, *De Re Rustica*, ed. and trans. by Giangirolamo Pagani (Venice: Giuseppe Antonelli, 1846) bk. 2, ch. 1, col. 581; and *On Agriculture*, trans. W. D Hooper and Harrison Boyd Ash (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1934), 316-7.

In this thesis, to avoid confusion between the Constantinopolitan and Cimmerian straits, the following convention will be used. Bosphorus (with an h and u) will refer to the straits near Constantinople; Bosporos (without an h or a u), to the straits on the Sea of Azov.

² Euxine, along with Pontus, is one of the many names for the Black Sea.

³ Unless otherwise specified, a capitalised "Sea" refers to the Black Sea.

turntable of international trade”.⁴ Such a description, however, can be applied with almost equal validity to the pre-Fall Black Sea, which also thrived on such international trade.

i. Setting the scene – geography and history

Geography

The Black Sea is, to an extent, a fractal of the Mediterranean.⁵ Roughly elliptical, it sits in the north-east quadrant of that larger sea⁶, with maritime entry only available through a single, narrow strait: the Bosphorus.⁷ It stretches roughly 300 miles north-to-south, and 600 east-to-west. In turn, the Black Sea possesses its own fractal – the Sea of Azov, again sitting in the north-east quadrant, again only accessible through a single slight passage, the Straits of Kerch, also known as the Cimmerian Bosphoros. The Sea of Azov is roughly 230 miles long, and 105 miles at its widest point.

Let us travel round the Black Sea coastline, starting at the Bosphorus straits. Heading north (clockwise, as it were), we run along the coastlines of modern Turkey and the Thracian plains, before passing the Balkan mountain range in Bulgaria. Next, we sail past the coast of what is now Romania, reaching the mouth of the Danube, a major river which flows from its source in the Black Forest for nearly 1800

⁴ This memorable phrase (originally ‘*plaque tournante du trafic international*’) was coined by Brătianu to describe the Black Sea during the period c.1260-1340. It was since popularised by Balard. G. I. Brătianu, “*La mer Noire, plaque tournante du trafic international a la fin du Moyen Age*”, *Revue historique du Sud-Est européen* 21 (1944), 36-69; Michel Balard, “*Gênes et la mer Noire (XIII e -XV e siècles)*”, *Revue Historique* 270 (1983), 33.

⁵ Readers are referred to the maps in Appendix 1, beginning on page 221, for a visual aid.

⁶ Whether the Black Sea is part of the Mediterranean, or a distinct Sea in its own right, is a semantic argument of interest to oceanographers. In this thesis, it will be treated as a marginal sea of the Mediterranean, due to its connections with the larger sea. From a ‘scientific’ perspective, the International Hydrographic Organization views the Black Sea not as a sub-division of the Mediterranean, but a separate Sea in its own right; similarly, the Azov is viewed as distinct from the Euxine. International Hydrographic Organization, *Limits of Oceans and Seas: Special Publication N^o. 23*, 3rd edition (Monte Carlo: Monégasque, 1953), 18.

⁷ The distinction between Bosphorus (with an h and u) and Bosporos (without an h or u) is an important one to note. The former refers to the straits near Constantinople; the latter, to a point on the entry to the Sea of Azov. Spellings of the two locations are variable (see footnote 1); however, here the above spellings will be used consistently to avoid confusion.

miles through eleven countries, before emptying into the Black Sea at the northern reaches of Romania's coastline.

North of the Danube, the ecology of the coastline changes. Instead of the temperate forests on its southern side, we now reach the Pontic-Caspian Steppe, a broad, flat expanse of fertile grassland stretching from the Danube as far east as the Ural River in Kazakhstan. It is this grassland which defines much of the region north of the Black Sea. From the mouth of the Danube, this coastline curves round north-east and then east as we continue into Ukraine, where we cross the mouths of three more rivers – the comparatively small Dniester and Southern Bug rivers, and then the significantly larger Dnieper, the 1400-mile route of which begins near Smolensk in Russia, and flows through Kiev on its way to the Euxine.

Shortly after the Dnieper, we reach a defining geographical point of the Black Sea – the diamond-shaped Crimean Peninsula. Connected to the mainland by an isthmus only 3 miles wide, it extends some 120 miles southward into the Sea, surprisingly close to Anatolia. The southern tip of the Crimea is lined with steep mountains, walling off its southern region from the steppe-plains to the north. Toward the southern tip of the diamond, very slightly on its western side, was the medieval city of Cherson⁸, where now is modern Sevastopol.

As the peninsula heads eastward (its widest stretch being nearly 200 miles long), we reach the medieval city of Bosphoros, now Kerch, which dominates the straits of the same name, controlling access to the Sea of Azov. This smaller sea's western reaches (the Crimean coast) are marshy and inhospitable, and the northern and eastern coastlines are defined by spits and silty bays, formed by the outflow of the many small rivers which flow into the Azov. Chief amongst these is the Don, a 1200-

⁸ In the main body of the thesis, all Black Sea settlements will be referred to by their contemporary Byzantine names, excepting rare cases. For a list of towns and a table of various alternative names, see Appendix 1, beginning on page 221.

Again, readers are asked to note the difference between the modern city of Kherson (with a K), in mainland Ukraine (which will not feature in this thesis), and the Byzantine city of Cherson (with a C), on the Crimean peninsula, in modern Sevastopol.

mile river which rises near Tula, south of Moscow, and flows southwards to the Azov. A notable geostrategic feature of this river is its proximity, at its easternmost point, to the Volga river. The Volga rises to the north-west of Moscow, and follows a 2200-mile course, first east and then south, before draining into the Caspian Sea. Whilst the Volga and Don were only connected by a 60-mile canal in 1952, in medieval times their proximity was such that portage – that is, the overland transfer of ships from one river to the other – was perfectly possible. On the south-eastern coast of the Sea of Azov is the Kuban River delta. The Kuban flows some 400 miles from the Caucasus mountains, before spilling out into the Azov Sea from the Taman Peninsula, a soft and marshy expanse, dotted with mud volcanoes. Whilst currently the Kuban river delta only drains into the the Azov, formerly it would have additionally flowed directly into the Black Sea.

South of the Kerch straits, we return to the Black Sea proper, and head along the the Caucasian coastline of Russia and Georgia. Here, the geography is dominated first by the mountains of the Greater Caucasus range, and then, after we pass a short plain near the mouth of the Rioni or Phasis river, the Lesser Caucasus. Reaching the borders of modern Turkey once again, we pivot around the city of Trebizond (modern Trabzon), isolated from its hinterland by steep and challenging mountains, and head back west. This Anatolian coastline remains fairly mountainous – the Pontic range – and curves a little way north as we reach the city of Sinope (modern Sinop). An important, though perhaps surprising, geographical note here is that Sinope, despite being approximately the midpoint of the southern coast of the Black Sea, is actually closer to the northern coast (the tip of the Crimean peninsula) than it is to Constantinople on the Bosphorus, a significant geographical oddity.⁹ Our journey continues: tilting back south-west from the headland of Sinope, the mountains fade away, and eventually we reach the Eastern coast of the Bosphorus, back at our starting point.

⁹ The closest point of Anatolia to Crimea may actually be Cape Kerempe, approximately 125 miles to the west of Sinope; however, the difference in crossing-distance to the Crimea is minimal (c.20 miles).

This combination of geographical features lends itself to nautical travel. The extent of mountainous regions along the coastline – the Balkans in the west, the Crimean in the north, and particularly the Caucasus and Pontic ranges in the east and south – inhibit overland journeys in these regions. On the other hand, a large number of rivers notch the coastline. I have above mentioned only the larger and most significant ones, and those smaller ones which will feature in the upcoming discussions, but in total, there are approximately 1000 rivers which empty into the Euxine.¹⁰ As a result, journeys around the Black Sea, especially before the era of the automobile, generally were taken, in part if not entirely, by water. Whilst the naval lure of this sea is less pronounced in its north-eastern reaches, where overland travel is easier and safe harbour harder to find, for the vast majority of the Euxine coastline, maritime travel is by far the easier mode of transport for a journey of any distance. Thus, the Black Sea formed a natural, and often essential, ‘connective tissue’, linking all those who lived and travelled along its shores.

Hydrology

The Black Sea itself was largely conducive to such connectivity. The bulk of the sea is surprisingly deep – the Euxine Abyssal Plain reaches some 2,200 metres, with only the north-western gulf and the Sea of Azov lying outside it. Above this Plain, there are two prevailing currents in the Black Sea, one in its western half, one in its east, both of which flow anticlockwise – the Western and Eastern Gyres, separated by the arrow of the Crimean Peninsula.¹¹ There are a few areas which fall outside of these currents, for example the smaller, independent ‘coastal eddies’ near Trebizond and the northern Caucasus. The most significant of these areas is the north-western portion of the Black Sea, roughly everywhere north of a line stretching from Cherson to Constanta. Here, the sea is notably shallower, and the Western Gyre leaves it largely untouched.

¹⁰ Shalva Jaoshvili, *The Rivers of the Black Sea – Technical Report No. 71* (Copenhagen: European Environment Agency, 2002), 28.

¹¹ See Map 5, on page 229.

The benefit of these gyres for Euxine maritime trade is twofold. At a basic level, their presence means that it is exceptionally easy to sail around the Black Sea coastline in an anti-clockwise direction, carried along by the currents. It is certainly possible to oppose these currents when desirable – for example, for a coastal voyage from Trebizond to Constantinople, discussion of which will feature often in this thesis. Nonetheless, with the currents at your back, sailing could at times become very easy.

However, the primary advantage of the gyres is their meeting point – the swathe of sea between the southern tip of the Crimea and the headland of Sinope, where the Black Sea is at its narrowest. Here, the western and eastern gyres flow past each other – potentially a very treacherous situation, allowing for ships to be caught and turned around abruptly. However, a knowledgeable captain could easily avoid this hazard, and instead make use of the benefit of this meeting point; namely, that whether travelling from Sinope to the Crimea, or vice-versa, there was a current supporting your direction of travel. Thus, at the narrowest point of the sea, ships could quite rapidly and fairly easily switch between its northern and southern coasts. Whilst long open water voyages were not always an option, this shorter journey – a day and a night in one Ancient Greek source – could be done with relative ease.¹²

However, it should not be supposed that voyagers upon the sea could be complacent. Knowledge of the winds was essential. The prevailing wind in the Black Sea is a northerly¹³ one, which covers more-or-less the whole sea, excepting a small region around Trebizond where the air currents are more variable.¹⁴ This wind prevails for about 8 or 9 months of the year, except around the equinoxes, in spring and autumn, when the wind reverses direction and blows south-to-north for a short period.¹⁵

¹² Jaime Morton, *The Role of the Physical Environment in Ancient Greek Seafaring* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 164 n28.

¹³ i.e. from north to south.

¹⁴ Emil V. Stanev, "Understanding Black Sea Dynamics: An Overview of Recent Numerical Modeling", *Oceanography* 18.2 (2005), 59 & 70-72 (figs 1 and 13); Marianna Koromila, *The Greeks in the Black Sea from the Bronze Age to the Early Twentieth Century* (Athens: Panorama, 1991), 33.

¹⁵ *The Black Sea Pilot: The Dardanelles, Sea of Marmara, Bosphorus, Black Sea, and Sea of Azov*, 1st Edition (Washington, D.C.: United States Hydrographic Office, 1920), 128.

These winds not only buoyed ships; they could have far more negative effects. Take, for example, the voyage of Ibn Battuta in the 1330s. Travelling firstly from Anatolia to the Crimea, in opposition to the northerly wind, he was obliged to wait 51 days for a favourable breeze, before he could finally cross. Three days into his voyage, the wind brought him a new trouble – he was caught in a “terrible tempest... with unparalleled fury” that blew the ship back to Sinope. On his second attempt, he was caught in another storm which blew him off course as far as Kerch. Eventually despairing of his intended destination, he had the captain set him down somewhere on the steppe-coast and journeyed onwards overland.¹⁶ Such difficulty with the winds was not untypical. The northerly winds can bring terrible tempests, often - but far from exclusively – in the form of a freezing winter *Bora*, an icy gale which strikes particularly viciously in the eastern portions of the Sea. Nor is it just the northerly winds which cause problems. Southerly winds, as appear in spring and autumn, come without difficulties of their own – they can be just as violent, and caught by them whilst in the vicinity of the Bug, Dniester or Danube rivers will be in greater difficulty – the combination of the wind hitting against the outflow of those rivers results in particularly vicious waves which can toss ships back and forth perilously.¹⁷ It may well have been waves such as these which hindered Andronikos I Komnenos’ flight from Constantinople in September 1185: “but even the sea was vexed with Andronikos... the waves rose straight up and fell back with a yawning chasm and leaped up again to swallow him, and the ship was cast towards shore. Again and again this happened, and Andronikos was hindered from crossing over”.¹⁸ Below these dangerous waves can lurk greater hazards. The rocky nature of the shore gave rise to a significant number of reefs and undersea hazards. One pilot-book listed in the Black Sea

¹⁶ Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-54*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb (London: Broadway House, 1929), 147-55.

¹⁷ *The Black Sea Pilot*, 128-9

¹⁸ Nicetas Choniates, *Historiae*, ed. Jan Louis van Dieten (Berlin: *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 9, 1975), 348; Harry Magoulias, trans, *O City of Byzantium: The Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 192.

101 permanent physical dangers – reefs, rocks, shoals and the like – for which a captain needed to be prepared before travel.¹⁹

This count is exclusive of both the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait, which come with their own set of hazards. The Sea of Azov is the shallowest sea in the world: Its deepest point is only 14 metres and its average depth only 7 metres. As noted above, the Azov is defined by spits and lagoons, erosion and silting. Its western coast is bordered by the Syvash, a system of shallow lagoons and marshes separated from the Azov Sea proper by the Arabat Spit. This region was memorably described by Rabbi Petachia as “the Stinky Sea, [which] if any individual passed, he would die immediately”.²⁰ Entry to the Sea of Azov is only possible through a narrow and shallow passage - the Straits of Kerch or the Cimmerian Bosphoros. The combination of its shallow depth, silty marshes and near-complete separation from the rest of the Black Sea led many ancient and medieval writers to view the Azov not as a sea, but rather as a lake or simply a large river-delta.²¹ Thus, while the Black Sea itself was, to an experienced sailor accessible and even welcoming, the Sea of Azov was a far less congenial prospect. Any ship of significant-enough draught to sail the Black Sea safely, would be at constant risk of running aground on the shifting shoals or sandbars of the more treacherous Azov. Safety in one sea would be risk in the other. Thus the Straits of Kerch marked an important point of transition between two different maritime worlds.

With all this in mind, the Greek name for the Black Sea – Εύξεινος, meaning ‘hospitable’ – may seem ironic. But we should not be overfearful – winds, reefs, currents and storms could all be negotiated by a skilled sailor. What we should note from this description of the waters of the Black Sea are two key

¹⁹ *The Black Sea Pilot*, 125-232 & 273-320. The count is based on references to any undersea hazards, excluding those which would not have been problematic in the Middle Ages (e.g. propeller-entangling kelp). Temporary hazards, e.g. potential wind-current interactions, were excluded. The Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait were excluded from this count due to the particularly mutable nature of the sea and its coastline, rendering any modern analysis of its hazards useless for a medieval historian.

²⁰ Rabbi Petachia, *Travels of Rabbi Petachia of Ratisbon*, trans. Dr. A Benisch (London: Trubner & Co, 1856), 3.

²¹ *Inter alia*, the Hereford Map, which refers to both the “Fluvius Maeotides” and the associated swamps (“palludes”). Scott D. Westrem, *The Hereford Map: A Transcription and Translation of the Legends with Commentary* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 136-9.

points. Firstly, the interaction of the gyres in the centre of the sea, creating a sort of maritime highway for ease of travel between Anatolia and Crimea; and secondly, the prominence of the northerly wind, which could make sailing in opposition to it a challenging task indeed.

History²²

Having explored the geography and hydrology of the Black Sea, we can now turn to its history, establishing the context in which the following discussions will take place. We shall begin, as before, at the Bosphorus, where Constantinople, the seat of the Byzantine Emperor and to some extent the focal point of this thesis, sat in domination over the straits. The Emperor's realm stretched over Greece, much of the Balkans, Thrace and Bulgaria, many Aegean islands, the Anatolian peninsula, and some southern exclaves in the Crimean peninsula. During our two centuries, the throne in Constantinople was occupied by 23 emperors, from Basil II 'the Bulgar-Slayer' to Alexios V Doukas 'Mourtzouphlos'. The political history of this Empire is, therefore, naturally rather involved, and even a potted history of the 200 years under examination in this thesis would become extended and distract from the main argument of this work. Instead, we shall give only general considerations for Byzantium's history during this period.

The Empire faced manifold threats: in the West, the rising star of the Normans of Southern Italy and Sicily, which shone avariciously on the Byzantine exclaves in Italy, and beyond that, the Byzantine Balkans; In the East, the furious and fast-blowing wind of the Seljuq Turks, who, having sacked Baghdad now raced through the Anatolian and Caucasian mountain ranges, pushing dangerously against all the eastern walls and borders of the Empire; from the north, Pecheneg incursions against Thrace and Macedonia increased after Basil I's conquest of Bulgaria; and from within, the ever-smouldering fire of domestic unrest – not only nationalist uprisings from the subjugated Bulgars, but

²² The following political history will be, for reasons of brevity and necessity, rather simplified. The focus of this thesis is on the economic, not political, aspects of the Black Sea, and this section is intended only to provide context, rather than historic argument.

more commonly political chicanery and outrage from the political-military class. Cheynet counted 223 revolts against Byzantine emperors in the period 963-1210 – one every 1.1 years. Of these, Alexios I Komnenos, who reigned from 1081 to 1118 (during the midpoint of this thesis' period), would face 20 – the most of any emperor.²³ He himself had emerged the victor of a multi-party civil war after the capture of Romanos IV Diogenes by the Seljuqs, and his dynasty would come to an end through a similar usurpation by Isaac II Angelos.²⁴

To oversimplify, the general trend of the Empire during these two centuries is one of decline. In 1018, Basil II, having subjugated Bulgaria, now ruled over an expansive Byzantium, stretching from Armenia to Italy, from the Crimea to Antioch; in 1100, Alexios I would be fighting to regain much of this lost land, from Seljuq and Norman, forced to find alliances with enemies, and finding his best laid plans complicated by commencement of the Crusades; and in 1204, the Empire collapsed: bankrupt, mismanaged, splintered. The great city of Constantinople would be sacked by the combined Frankish and Venetian force of the Fourth Crusade. Thus decapitated, the Empire was divided up between the Latin Empire, the Venetian *Stato da Màr*, and the various Byzantine successor states centred in Nicaea, Trebizond and Epirus. In 1261, Michael VIII Palaiologos would recapture Constantinople, and resurrect the Byzantine Empire into a second shadow-life; but in 1204, the collapse of Byzantium seemed complete. The ramifications of the Fourth Crusade were immense, not only for the Black Sea but the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean.

For Georgia, however, the narrative follows quite the reverse. In 1008, the Kingdom was born from warring petty princedoms, united under Bagrat III, whose adoption by Davit III of Tao united several political entities together. However, for 80 years, this nascent kingdom was beaten from pillar to post,

²³ Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963-1210)* (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1996), 20-156.

²⁴ For an account of the civil wars leading to Alexios' capture of the Empire, see Anthony Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), especially 264-270.

both by the Byzantine campaigns in the Caucasus, and the ever-present threat of internal strife. This latter posed significant problems for the Kingdom: even the nationalist *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the state histories of Georgia, felt compelled to say that “the Georgian race is by its nature disloyal to its sovereign. As soon as they have raised themselves, put on some flesh, reached a state of honor and peace, they immediately start to contemplate all kinds of mischief, as the ancient chronicles of Kartli relate.”²⁵ Then came the crowning threat – the arrival, in the 1080s, of the Seljuqs in the southern Caucasus, heralds of a period known to the chroniclers as the *Didi Turkoba*, or ‘Great Turkish Troubles’. King Giorgi II, vacillating and ineffective, did not prove up to the task; he bought the Seljuqs off with a heavy tribute, but was nonetheless forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Davit IV.²⁶

Davit IV ‘The Restorer’ ushered in a new period of growth for Georgia; his reign is seen as the start of a Golden Age for the Kingdom. He swiftly evicted the Seljuqs, and began to expand his borders at every opportunity, even capturing the wealthy city of Tbilisi, which had been lost to Georgia for four centuries. His crowning military achievement was the much-eulogised Battle of Didgori, in which his personal leadership of a small force saw the defeat of an Islamic coalition of much greater size. In addition to this, he was well-read and cultured, and like his biblical namesake, wrote a collection of psalms. He strengthened the power of the state, crushed rebellious nobles, and brought the Kingdom of Georgia into the light of success. He was – of course – canonized upon his death. After a few indifferent monarchs, Davit’s great-granddaughter, Tamar, took the throne, and much like her predecessor, quelled threats both internal and external. Her first husband, the Russian Yuri, was expelled from the country, and beaten back both times he tried to regain his bride; however, Tamar’s second match, David Soslan, was far more successful. Georgian borders were once again expanded, with the subjugation of vassal states on all her borders. The culmination of this expansion was the establishment of the Empire of Trebizond, a semi-puppet state under a scion of the Byzantine

²⁵ ‘The Life of David, King of Kings’, trans. Dmitri Gamq’relidze, in *The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba* (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), 188.

²⁶ ‘The Life of David, King of Kings’, 172-3.

Komnenian dynasty related to Tamar, centred on that wealthy port-city. This military expansion was coupled with a cultural revival, exemplified by the Georgian Epic *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, a deep, poetic metaphor for Tamar's reign. The contrasts with Byzantium's fortunes are striking – from the quarry of Basil's ascendant empire in the early years of the millennium, Georgia had risen to undreamt-of heights, establishing successor states for the Empire which had once been her master.

A third important polity for our thesis is the newly-solidified state of the Kievan Rus'. Having descended from Novgorod and established a principdom centred on Kiev, the Rus' were in equal parts mercantile and militaristic. Many of their merchant class travelled broadly, from end to end of Europe and far east into Arab lands and central Asia, largely by small ships through river systems. However, after their Christianization under Prince Vladimir in the late 10th century, the Rus' connections to Byzantium were central to their economy and culture (as will be seen). Trade convoys sailed down the Dnieper and across the Black Sea yearly to bring northern goods to Constantinople, and would return months later with goods purchased in the Empire. Kiev also served as a through-region for the connection of Varangian Scandinavia and Byzantium. Militarily, they were constantly striving against the Pechenegs and Qipjaqs²⁷, Turkic tribes who dwelt in the region between Kiev and the Black Sea, and thus always posed a threat to merchant-adventures travelling the route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks'. The Kievans held their own against them – particularly notable were the successes of Vladimir II Monomakh, whose victories against the Qipjaqs would force a great many of them out of the Rus' realm to the Caucasus. However, the Kievan polity, like the Georgians and Byzantines, was the victim of internal power struggles, often involving Turkic mercenaries from the steppe. The apogee of such struggles was the sack of Kiev in 1169 by a collection of Rus' princes.²⁸

²⁷ The Qipjaqs have many names, and many variations on those names; the most common alternative is 'Cuman', or variations thereof. The choice of Qipjaq for this thesis, over any of the alternatives, is an arbitrary one; I could find no compelling reason to choose one particular version of their name over any other.

²⁸ Thomas S. Noonan, "Rus', Pechenegs and Polovtsy: Economic interaction along the steppe frontier in the Pre-Mongol Era", *Russian History* 19 (1992), 302.

The struggling Rus', the ascendant Georgians, the doomed Byzantines – these three powers surrounded the Black Sea, their borders threatened by nomadic Turkic tribes, their thrones threatened by avaricious and ambitious nobles. The compression of two centuries, fraught with political strife, gives an impression of such a traumatic scenario that commerce and finance could hardly thrive. However, despite such angst – indeed, given the role of the Qipjaqs and Seljuqs in the trading patterns which will be discussed, perhaps *because* of such angst – the economy of the Black Sea would nonetheless flourish.

Some notes on seafaring

Currently, surprisingly little is known about the practical nature of seafaring in the Black Sea before the golden era of the Italian Maritime republics in the late 13th and 14th centuries. Fortunately, this looks as though it is likely to change drastically in the future. The lower portions of the Black Sea are anoxic and inhospitable to life; as a result, shipwrecks which rest in this portion of the Sea remain in almost perfect conditions. The Black Sea Maritime Archaeology Project (MAP) has made excellent use of this; between 2015 and 2017, in Bulgarian waters alone, the MAP found 65 wrecks, ranging from 4th century BC to the 19th century AD. So well preserved are these wrecks, that still-coiled ropes, and even decorative carvings in the wood, are easily visible in the 3D scans.²⁹ However, the combination caused by the inundation of new material, and the volatile situation in the Black Sea at present, has caused some impediment, and, as yet, none of these wrecks have been published in detail. I very much hope this will change in the next few years.

The knowledge of such treasure makes it all the more frustrating that we currently know so little. It is not the role of this thesis to engage deeply with the 'how' of seafaring; instead the focus is on the

²⁹ Rodrigo Pacheco-Ruiz *et al.*, "Deep sea archaeological survey in the Black Sea – Robotic documentation of 2,500 years of human seafaring", *Deep Sea Research Part I* 152 (2019), 1-16.

‘why’, the ‘where’ and the ‘when’. I shall therefore give only a brief description of the current understanding.

It is first necessary to note that for several Euxine nations, we have almost no evidence that they engaged in seafaring at all. The Qipjaqs, for example, did not appear to have any maritime capabilities, although there is a reference to them being present at an overseas market; whether it was them or their representatives, and whether they travelled by sea or land to get there, is unclear.³⁰ The Seljuqs appeared to have some maritime merchants at the turn of the 13th century, but beyond that we have no information.³¹ A Persian source calls the Black Sea ‘the Sea of the Georgians’ which implies some engagement with the Euxine; however, other sources give no indication of maritime activity from Georgia.³²

This is not true for all Euxine coastal peoples. For two of these peoples, we know they were certainly capable sailors. The Rus’ engaged with the rivers and the Black Sea to a great extent; the details of this engagement will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, so I shall pass over them here.³³ This leaves the Byzantines. As Pryor notes, however, whilst we often have generic references to ships and sailing, details of Byzantine naval technology, particularly outside a martial setting, are “scant [and] reveal precious little.” We have some indication of technological development – for example, lateen sails, which allow ships to sail against the wind when they ‘tack’, may have been in use since the sixth century.³⁴ However, while western Europe did make nautical advances in the 12th century, resulting

³⁰ D. S. Richards, trans. *The Chronicle of Ibn al -Athir for the Crusading Period*, vol. 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 113. This will be discussed on page 153.

³¹ Choniates, *Historiae*, 529; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 290.

³² *Hudūd al-‘Ālam – The Regions of the World: a Persian Geography 372 A.H. / 982 A. D.*, trans. V. Minorski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), 53. For more on Georgia’s lack of integration with the Black Sea, see, page 148-9.

³³ This discussion takes place in Chapter 3, on pages 126 ff.

³⁴ John Pryor, ‘Shipping and Seafaring’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Robin Comack, John F. Haldon and Elizabeth Jeffreys (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 484-5.

in larger, multi-masted and -decked ships, we do not know to what extent, if at all, this technology was adopted by the Byzantines.³⁵

Our best insight into 10th-12th century Byzantine shipping comes from the Serçe Limanı wreck, found near the harbour of the same name, slightly north of Rhodes. A small merchant-ship transporting a range of goods from the Levant towards Constantinople, it sank suddenly in 1025, and remained, slowly decaying, in that harbour until its excavation beginning in 1979. There is much to be learned from this wreck, but for our purposes, it is enough simply to describe the type of ship, as an example of the sort of ship with which we will be dealing in this thesis. Slightly more than 15 metres long, with a deck, and estimated draft of 1.5m when fully laden, the Serçe Limanı had a cargo capacity of about 35 tons.³⁶ The top portion of the ship was not preserved, so suggestions of its rig and tackle are only speculative; however, based on a detailed analysis of centres of buoyancy and gravity, alongside a reconstruction of the ship, the “most plausible and efficient” setup for the Serçe Limanı ship would have been a two-masted double-lateen rig.³⁷ Lateen sails would seem especially likely given that there is evidence the ship was prepared for long open-water voyages. The presence of sheep-bones and grape pips together in amphoras indicates preserved meat, and the discovery of a “sheep or goat dropping” suggests there may even have been live animals kept on board – arguably the best method of preservation; this, coupled with the presence of gaming pieces, led to the hypothesis that this was a ship capable of going for a week, maybe more, without landing on the coast.³⁸ Nonetheless, longer journeys like those would have remained the exception, rather than the rule. Open-water sailing carried with it greater risks, whereas harbour-to-harbour cabotage was a much safer course, when

³⁵ Pryor, ‘Shipping and Seafaring’, 485-6.

³⁶ George F. Bass, Sheila D. Matthews, J. Richard Steffy and Drederick H. van Doorninck, Jr, eds, *Serçe Limanı: An Eleventh-Century Shipwreck. Volume 1 – The Ship and Its Anchorage, Crew and Passengers* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 167-9.

³⁷ Bass *et al.*, *Serçe Limanı*, 182 & 485.

³⁸ Bass *et al.*, *Serçe Limanı*, 339 & 485.

available – after all, it was because the Serçe Limanı was so close to shore that its crew likely escaped its sudden and surprising sinking.³⁹

Admittedly, we are using a data-set of one; it could well be that the wreck at the Serçe Limanı was an anomaly. Nonetheless, this is the information we have to go on, and thus we have the image of the sort of ship which this thesis will follow on its voyages around and across the Black Sea. Not excessively large, nor excessively capacious, but nonetheless hardy and capable of carrying a significant cargo, possibly – assuming the weather did not turn against her – across open water without insurmountable difficulties. In the words of J. Richard Steffy, “a little merchant vessel that was full and flat and simply built... and that was it”.⁴⁰

ii. Historiography

Frameworks

Historical study of the Medieval Black Sea has been limited; this is especially the case with the period prior to the Fourth Crusade. In part, this is due to the Black Sea’s perceived isolation from the ‘real’ Mediterranean. Separated from the rest of the sea by the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, it is often regarded as a separate entity. Geologically, this is somewhat true – the Black Sea was originally a glacial lake, before it connected to the Mediterranean at some point during the Holocene era.⁴¹ Regardless of the geological origins, the Black Sea is – rightly or wrongly – treated separately from Mediterranean histories. Nonetheless, the methodology of the histories of the Mediterranean can shed light on similar approaches for the Black Sea.

³⁹ Bass *et al.*, *Serçe Limanı*, 4.

⁴⁰ Bass *et al.*, *Serçe Limanı*, 153.

⁴¹ ‘Black Sea’, Encyclopaedia Britannica, last modified November 11, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Black-Sea/Climate>.

The pioneer in the field of Mediterranean history was Fernand Braudel (1902-1985), whose two-volume *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, first published in 1949, is a landmark of the Annales school.⁴² Examining the history of the sea at three scales – *longue durée*, *moyenne durée*, and *histoire événementielle* – he painted a portrait of a sea ringed by mountains and deserts, the geography of which dictated the life of “the individual... imprisoned within a destiny in which he himself has little hand, fixed in a landscape in which the infinite perspectives of the long term stretch into the distance both behind him and before. In historical analysis... the long run always wins in the end.”⁴³ On the one hand, such an approach presents a ‘solution’ to history which can be quite appealing; on the other hand, as with other monocausal historiographic approaches, such as some of the environmental histories which will be discussed below, Braudel’s approach can lead to oversimplification of the diverse, even chaotic, unfolding of history. Certainly there is much to be said for the influence of geographical fact on historical event; but to deny human agency in history is somewhat to deny history itself.

Following Braudel’s impressive and imposing work, histories of the Mediterranean fell from prominence, in part due to the belief that there was nothing more to say. Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, in 2000, published *The Corrupting Sea*, which took Braudel’s geographic near-fatalism and gave it new nuance.⁴⁴ The Mediterranean must be divided into local ‘micro-ecologies’, that is to say “definite places with distinct identities derived from the set of available productive opportunities and the particular interplay of human responses to them”. This represented a significant advancement on Braudel’s approach – it was no longer merely geography that defined the course of history, but rather the way humans approached, tamed and overcame – or failed to overcome – the geographical limitations of their surroundings. In Horden and Purcell’s own words, their aim with “this

⁴² Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 volumes (London: University of California Press, 1995).

⁴³ Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*, vol. 2, 1244.

⁴⁴ Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

microregional approach [was to] put people before physical geography.”⁴⁵ On the one hand, returning the human to the forefront of history can be commended; on the other, the micro-ecological approach requires a depth of research that seems impossible to maintain for a region as large as the Black Sea, let alone the Mediterranean as a whole. One of Horden and Purcell’s case studies was the region of Cyrenaica, west of Egypt; their endeavours to examine this region required that their “focus of analysis must be sharpened [and] be founded on the study of the local, the small scale – the specific wadi, cove or cluster of springs and wells”.⁴⁶ Such exhaustive analysis of these micro-details may allow for a ‘higher-resolution’ study of history, but surely require a framework of larger-scale history to build upon. Certainly, attempting to apply this approach to the Black Sea, with its 6,000 miles of coastline, and often extensive hinterlands, would require far more space than a thesis such as this could permit.

The third significant Mediterranean history is David Abulafia’s *The Great Sea*.⁴⁷ Subtitled *A Human History of the Mediterranean*, Abulafia was clear about his attempt to bring the anthropogenic aspect of history to the forefront: “This book... aims to bring to the fore the human experience of... existence on the sea. The human hand has been more important in moulding the history of the Mediterranean than Braudel was ever prepared to admit... the roulette wheel spins and the outcome is unpredictable, but human hands spin the wheel.”⁴⁸ Compared to Braudel and Horden and Purcell, geographical determinism is almost completely absent from Abulafia’s work; nonetheless, Abulafia’s work demonstrated that even without unusual historiographical frameworks, a history of the Mediterranean as a region in itself was indeed possible.

Thus these three Mediterranean histories all took vastly different approaches to the study of their shared topic – the impossibly grand, the microscopically local, and the truly human – each of which has their strengths and weaknesses. Of these three frameworks, this thesis and its author own most

⁴⁵ Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 80.

⁴⁶ Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 74.

⁴⁷ David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁸ Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, xxx-xxxi.

to Braudel. A larger work than this could review the economics of the Black Sea with a view to Horden and Purcell's microecologies; and another historian could rewrite this topic with Abulafia's focus on individual people – but that would be a different work. It is the underlying framework of this thesis that trade patterns are determined, at large, by geographical connections or obstacles, and the long-term development of the resulting routes is given more attention than momentary interruptions or diversions, caused by details in the *histoire événementielle*. Individual humans are rarely brought to the forefront of this thesis; peoples and states, when needed, play their role, but the individual is treated mostly as example, rather than agent. Thus this thesis aims to be, in Horden and Purcell's phrasing, not history *in* the Black Sea, but rather a history *of* it – a Byzantine Black Sea, it is true, but nonetheless the focus of this study is the geographical entity of the Euxine itself, the trade that was carried across it, and the impact it had on the lives of those on its shores.

Euxine historiography

One point that unites these three Mediterranean histories is their deliberate exclusion of the Black Sea. For Braudel, the Black Sea was “only partly Mediterranean”; as a result, it was only indexed for 46 out of 1375 pages (3%).⁴⁹ In Horden and Purcell's work, it is indexed for only 9 pages out of the 776 total (1%).⁵⁰ Abulafia is very clear about its exclusion: The Black Sea “was a sea penetrated by Mediterranean merchants, rather than a sea whose inhabitants participated in the political, economic and religious changes taking place in the Mediterranean itself – its links across land, towards the Balkans, the Steppes and the Caucasus, gave the civilizations long its shores a different outlook and character to those of the Mediterranean”.⁵¹ As a result, it is indexed for 16 pages out of the 783 total (2%).⁵²

⁴⁹ Braudel, *The Mediterranean World*, 109.

⁵⁰ Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*.

⁵¹ Abulafia, *The Great Sea*, xxiii.

⁵² As a point of comparison, if the Euxine and Azov Seas were to be included in the Mediterranean, their surface area would comprise about 16% of this 'larger Mediterranean'; by coastline length, it would comprise 15%.

Thus, for any substantial historiography on the Black Sea, we have to look at those studying the region specifically, and in isolation from its surroundings. But here, too, however, there are difficulties in establishing a historiographical basis for the 11th- and 12th-century Black Sea, as historians have mostly been focussed on the late 13th and 14th centuries; understandably so, as this is the pinnacle of the Black Sea's economic importance, and the period which will be referred to as 'The Black Sea Boom'. "Infested" with Italian merchants, the Euxine became the "*plaque tournante*" of international trade during these years.⁵³ Truly, this 13th-14th century period was an exciting and interesting period of history, and worthy of the amount of study it has been given.

However, the brilliance of the later 13th-14th century Sea has led to neglect of its earlier period, prior to the Fourth Crusade, which falls into the shadow of such exciting and notorious icons of history as Genghis and Kublai Khan, Marco Polo, the Venetian and Genoese maritime empires, and the infamous Black Death. As a result, there is a tendency to give the earlier sea (somewhat lacking in such grand names) short shrift. Oftentimes the pre-Fall Black Sea is written off as a closed Byzantine lake, of no true importance to the rest of the world – a dormant backwater, awaiting its future greatness. It is usually dismissed briefly, if discussed at all, and often with prejudice.

This notion, of a closed and sleeping sea, can be traced at least back to the first historian of the region, Gheorghe I. Brătianu (1898-1953). Focussing his studies on the Genoese interactions with the Black Sea, he wrote, in 1929, that "L'interêt que les Grecs avaient à exclure les Occidentaux [*i.e. Genoese*] de ce marché étaient évident: ils entendaient se réserver l'importation du poisson et des fourrures du Nord à Constantinople."⁵⁴ This 'evident' claim went unsubstantiated, yet would be repeated in the

⁵³ Michel Balard, 'Gênes et la mer Noire', 33-4; Gheorghe I. Brătianu, 'La mer Noire, plaque tournante du trafic international', 36.

⁵⁴ Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Recherches sur le Commerce Génois dans la Mer Noire au XIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1929), 50. Under discussion here, and in the following quote, is the "Rhōsia and Matracha" clause, which will be the subject of extensive discussion in chapter 2, beginning on page 41.

works of many later historians.⁵⁵ Brătianu later wrote slightly more expansively: “Cette dernière interprétation [*of a more open Black Sea*] ne deviendrait certaine que si l’on découvrait quelque mention du commerce ou de la navigation des Génois dans un autre port de la mer Noire à cette époque; or, à notre connaissance tout au moins, aucune trace de la présence des marchands, non seulement génois mais italiens en general, n’a été relevée jusqu’ici sur le littoral pontique avant le tournant décisif de la IV^e croisade. *Byzance exerçait ici un monopole et le maintenait.*”⁵⁶

Both of these statements were written from the ‘perspective’ of the Genoese. Even allowing for Brătianu’s interpretation of the source material, his resulting conclusion of a ‘Closed Black Sea’ could only be applied as far as Genoese or Italian merchants. However, this discipline was not maintained, and the argument of Genoese exclusion was extrapolated, by others as by Brătianu, to a broader Byzantine monopoly.

Brătianu’s career (and eventually life) were brought to an untimely end by the apparatus of the Socialist Republic of Romania, depriving him of the opportunity to expand upon his ground-breaking research on the Euxine. The fallen and guttering torch was picked up by the French historian Michel Balard, who has written extensively on the ‘Genoese’ Black Sea. He built upon Brătianu’s work, especially regarding the later ‘Boom’ period; however the prejudice which has permeated Euxine historiography regarding the pre-Fall era is to be found here as well. According to Balard, Venetians were allowed throughout the Byzantine Empire, “sauf îles égéennes et la mer Noire, qui restent monopole byzantin.”⁵⁷ Elsewhere, in a similar vein, he stated that “jusqu’en 1204, l’empire byzantine

⁵⁵ Most commonly, this is done *via* the work of Balard. For example, Evgeny Khvalkov, *The Colonies of Genoa in the Black Sea Region: Evolution and Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2018) 60. Khvalkov claims that “there is now a general consensus that... the Black Sea was exclusively dominated by the Byzantines”, citing Michel Balard, ‘Byzance et les regions septentrionales de la mer Noire (XIII^e -XV^e siècles)’, *Revue Historique* 228.1 (1993), 19-23, which in turn cites Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *La mer Noire des origines à la conquête ottoman* (Munich: Societatea Academia Romana, 1969), 165.

⁵⁶ Brătianu, *La mer Noire: Des origines à la conquête ottoman*, 175-6. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ Michel Balard, ‘Un marche à prendre: l’invasion occidentale’ in *Constantinople 1054-1261: tête de la chrétienté proi des latins, capitale grecque*, edited by Michel Balard and Alain Ducellier (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1996), 188.

s'est réservé les ressources agricoles des régions pontiques pour le revêtement exclusif de Constantinople", and cites Brătianu for this claim.⁵⁸ This is a notable refinement – the Black Sea no longer is just Byzantine, but specifically supplies Constantinople. Such a claim is dubious – one of the few (but most well-known) sources which discusses Black Sea agriculture explicitly describes the export of Pontic grain to the (Byzantine) Crimea, not Constantinople, as we shall see. Nonetheless, Balard's assertion went unchallenged.

Elsewhere, it must be admitted, Balard gave the possibility of an open Euxine more thorough attention; however, even here it took only the form of an extended footnote, reaching the same conclusion as Brătianu: "Deux arguents vont à l'encontre de cette dernière interprétation [of an open Black Sea]: on ne trouve aucune trace de la présence de marchands génois en la mer Noire avant la IV^e Croisade... Il nous paraît donc que, soucieux de réserver aux Grecs le monopole des sources d'approvisionnement de la capitale, le *basileus* a délibérément écarté les Occidentaux du commerce pontique."⁵⁹

A parallel study, on Venetian rather than Genoese maritime enterprise, was written by Freddy Thieret, was equally dismissive of pre-Fall Black Sea prospects. In his 1959 work *La Romanie Vénitienne au Moyen Âge*, Thieret asserted that the Venetian grant of privileges in 1082 included the specific restriction that "ils ne peuvent accéder ni aux îles (sauf Chio) ni dans la mer Noire".⁶⁰ This exclusion he bases on the basis that they are not positively mentioned in the text, a theory which Jacoby has demonstrated to be inaccurate.⁶¹ Thieret does concede the possibility that, from 1198, the Venetians

⁵⁸ Michel Balard, 'Le commerce du blé en mer noire (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)', in *La mer Noire et la Romanie génoise (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)* (London: Variorum, 1989), 68 & n19.

⁵⁹ "Two arguments run contrary to this interpretation [of an open Black Sea]: Firstly, there has been found no trace of the presence of Genoese merchants in the Black Sea before the Fourth Crusade...it seems to us that, anxious to reserve for the Greeks the monopoly on the sources of supply for the capital, the Emperor deliberately excluded Westerners from Pontic commerce." Michel Balard, *La Romanie Génoise (XII^e - Début du XV^e Siècle)*, vol. 1 (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1978), 28n-29. Translation mine.

⁶⁰ Freddy Thieret, *La Romanie vénitienne au moyen âge: Le développement et l'exploitation du domaine colonial vénitien (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)* (Paris: De Boccard, 1959), 39.

⁶¹ David Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers and the Black Sea before 1204', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100.2 (2007), 681. See pages 97-8 for a discussion of this Chrysobull.

may have had access to (but not necessarily traded in) “Zagora”, a somewhat vague region which would have included areas on the Euxine coast of Thrace, but that is as far as he is willing to allow for Venetian access into the Euxine before the Fall of Constantinople in 1204.⁶² Like Balard and Brătianu before him, Thiriet’s interpretation of the Black Sea was a closed one.

However, not all historians gave the 11th and 12th century Black Sea such short shrift. Ralph-Johannes Lilie noted that the early period of Italian-Byzantine commercial relations were under-studied:

The numerous essays by Borsari, mainly on the relations between Venice and Byzantium, have remained virtually unknown. The recent monograph by Balard on the *Romanie Génoise* is for the 12th century only brief and general, in places even false, while in Bach's works on Genoa and in Abulafia’s on the commercial relations between northern and southern Italy in the same time-period, the sections concerning Byzantium are too short and inaccurate. A positive exception is Hendy alone, whose hypotheses are partly speculative - understandably because of the shortness of this otherwise excellent publication.⁶³

Lilie, too, came to the conclusion that “das Schwarze Meer, ebenso wie die See von Asow, nicht nur den Venezianern, sondern höchstwahrscheinlich auch den Genuesen und Pisanern verschlossen gewesen ist”.⁶⁴ However, he admitted that this was largely an *argumentum e silentio*.⁶⁵

⁶² Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne*, 59-60.

⁶³ Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Handel und Politik zwischen dem byzantinischen Reich und den italienischen Kommunen Venedig, Pisa und Genua in der Epoche der Komnenen und der Angeloi (1081-1204)* (Amsterdam: Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert, 1984), XII-XIII. Translation mine. The work of Balard referred to is most likely *La Romanie Génoise (XIIe- Début du XVe Siècle)*. The German text runs: “Die zahlreichen Aufsätze von Borsari, vorwiegend über die Beziehungen zwischen Venedig und Byzanz, sind so gut wie unbekannt geblieben. Die jüngst erschienene Monographie von Balard über die “Romanie genoise” is für das 12. Jahrhundert nur kurz und allgemein, stellenweise sogar falsch, während die Arbeiten von Bach über Genua und von Abulafia über die kommerziellen Beziehungen zwischen Nord- und Süditalien in derselben Zeit in den Abschnitten, die Byzanz betreffen, ebenfalls zu kurz und ungenau sind. Eine positive Ausnahme ist allein Hendy, dessen Thesen zum Teil war spekulativ – verständlich wegen der Kürze dieses ansonsten hervorragenden Aufsatzes – aber im großen und ganzen völlig überzeugend sind.”

⁶⁴ Lilie, *Handel und Politik*, 141.

⁶⁵ Lilie, *Handel und Politik*, 137.

Thus, while the early Black Sea was obtaining some more attention among academics, time and again, the conclusion was reached that the Black Sea was closed to the Mediterranean economy and merchants; select goods could only be obtained through reshipment from Constantinople alone, where they had been brought for or by Byzantine merchants. This was the result of what David Jacoby would later describe as “the skewed Eurocentric interpretation of sparse documentation.”⁶⁶ Perhaps the most notable opposition to this nigh-unanimous conclusion was that of M. E. Martin. His works are few; in 1979 he published an article entitled ‘The First Venetians in the Black Sea’, drawing on unusual sources, to argue for the presence – small, but historically significant – of Venetian merchants in the Black Sea prior to the Fourth Crusade.⁶⁷ However, he later revisited the topic, in a tone evocative of a forced recantation:

Until the Fourth Crusade the Black Sea was frequented only by Greek, Arab and Russian merchants: no sail of the Italian states, of Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa, Ancona or Venice was descried upon its waters, although the first two had property in Constantinople and vessels from the others were occasional, if irregular, visitors to the great city. For it is almost universally held that before the Fourth Crusade in 1204 turned Constantinople into the capital of a Latin, Western, Empire, the Black Sea was closed to Italian merchants. Ten years ago your present speaker raised a solitary challenge to this position and sought to show that the Venetian shipping was free to enter the Pontus and probably did so from the 1170s. In general his arguments have met with indignant dismissal or more sorrowful reproach. What

⁶⁶ David Jacoby, ‘Constantinople as a Commercial Transit Center, tenth to mid-fifteenth century’ in *Trade in Byzantium: Papers from the Third International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium*, edited by Paul Magdalino and Nevra Necipoğlu (Istanbul: Koç University, 2016), 197.

⁶⁷ M. E. Martin, ‘The First Venetians in the Black Sea’, *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 35 (1979), 111-122.

can be said without doubt is that access to the Black Sea was not a matter of urgent importance.⁶⁸

One could infer political, rather than academic, motives from the fact that Martin pronounces this conclusion not based on evidence, but rather “for it is almost universally held” to be so. In any event, he felt the opposition to his position was so strong, that he must renounce his position. However, there nonetheless is included an important detail in Martin’s rueful obeisance to the traditional historiographical view – the mention of “Greek, Arab or Russian merchants”. Until now, study of the Black Sea had been examined primarily through an Italian lens – how the Black Sea related to the burgeoning commercial enterprises of Venice and Genoa. The pre-Fall period was studied with an eye to the Black Sea’s later commercial domination by these Italian Republics. This is why such ink as had been spilled, was concerned with the openness of the Black Sea, particularly to Italian merchants, and its connections with the Mediterranean proper. Little attention had been given to those dwelling on or around the sea themselves.

In part this bias is due to the limitations of the surviving literary evidence. As the vast majority of Euxine nations were largely if not wholly illiterate, the body of source material is weighted in favour of Byzantium and the Latin West, both of whom left substantial written records.⁶⁹ The Byzantine empire has a substantial literary legacy – chronicles, letters, edicts, poems, dialogues, military manuals, religious texts, even a compendium on equine veterinary knowledge.⁷⁰ However, what is largely lacking in Byzantine sources is discussion of trade, especially the mundane daily activities; however, in the sources of the Italian merchant-republics, contracts and notarial documents are easily available, becoming more abundant throughout the High and Late Middle Ages. Such plentiful source material naturally draws the historian, especially the economic historian, of the Black Sea to Italian

⁶⁸ Michael E Martin, ‘The Venetians in the Black Sea: a general survey’, *Rivista di Bizantinistica* 3 (1993), 227.

⁶⁹ The nature of surviving evidence as used in this thesis is discussed at more length in the following section.

⁷⁰ For the latter, see Anne McCabe, *A Byzantine Encyclopaedia of Horse Medicine: The Sources, Compilation, and Transmission of the Hippitrica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

archives, and in parallel, leads Italian historians to consider the Black Sea within their researches. This can be seen in the diverse and exceedingly detailed work of the late David Jacoby (1928-2018), whose studies of the maritime economy around Constantinople touched on a wide range of topics, although nonetheless primarily (it would be fair to say) focussed on the Italians.⁷¹ Similarly, the notable recent contribution of Evgeny Khvalkov, which is focussed on the later, Italian, Black Sea, but nonetheless provides substantial coverage, both historical and historiographical, of earlier periods in order to properly examine the “evolution and transformation” with which he is concerned.⁷²

There have, however, been attempts to compensate for this bias. A hefty counterbalance has been provided by Jonathan Shepard, whose work on the Kievan Rus’ often led him further south to deal with their activities on the Black Sea itself.⁷³ In addition, there have been attempts at broader studies of the Black Sea beyond its relationship with individual nations, but as a region in its own right. One of the most interesting of these Maximilian Lau’s provocative essay, ‘Multilateral Cooperation in the Black Sea’, arguing for a peri-Euxine pact of Christian nations.⁷⁴ Broader studies have also been attempted, such as Charles King’s simply-titled and engagingly-written *The Black Sea: A History*.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Prominent examples would be David Jacoby, ‘Italian Privileges and Trade in Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade: A Reconsideration’, *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 24 (1994), 349-69, and ‘Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers and the Black Sea before 1204’, 677-699.

⁷² Khvalkov, *The Colonies of Genoa in the Black Sea Region: Evolution and Transformation*, 19-55.

⁷³ See, *inter alia*, Jonathan Shepard, ‘The Russian Steppe-Frontier and the Black Sea Zone’, *Archivon Πόντου* 35 (1979), 218-237, which is possibly the earliest example of Shepard dealing with the economy of the Black Sea in its own right, though there are several other examples.

⁷⁴ Maximilian C. G. Lau, ‘Multilateral Cooperation in the Black Sea in the Late Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries: The Case for an Alliance between Byzantium, Kiev and Georgia’, in *Cross Cultural Exchange in the Byzantine World*, edited by Kirsty Stewart and James Moreton Wakely (Oxford: Peter Land, 2016), 19-35.

⁷⁵ King’s work received complimentary reviews for its engaging style and broad sweep; however, its superficiality causes it to tread worryingly closer to historical inaccuracy at times than is perhaps allowable, and its breadth leads it to omit large sections of the Sea’s history for the sake of narrative. The period under discussion in this thesis merits a mere two pages in King’s book. Charles King, *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Gocha R. Tsetsckhadze, review of *The Black Sea: A History*, by Charles King, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 12.2 (2006), 299-302; Andrei Pippidi, review of *The Black Sea: A History* by Charles King, *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique* 2 (2006), 227-230; Maximilian C. G. Lau, ‘Multilateral Cooperation in the Black Sea in the Late Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries: The Case for an Alliance between Byzantium, Kiev and Georgia’, in *Cross Cultural Exchange in the Byzantine World*, edited by Kirsty Stewart and James Moreton Wakely (Oxford: Peter Land, 2016), 19-35.

However, studies remain absent on the relationship of the Black Sea with the nomadic Qipjaqs, or the Golden-Era kingdom of Georgia.

An additional front of research, which, whilst not strictly focussed on the Black Sea, is certainly relevant to this thesis, is the environmental history of the Eastern Mediterranean and surrounding regions. Focussed on the history of the region's climate, discussion focusses around the hypothesis of an Eastern Mediterranean 'Collapse' around the turn of the first millennium. Drawing on both traditional historical sources, such as chronicles and other written sources, as well as the 'Archives of Nature', which include analysis of tree-rings, preserved pollen, and mineral deposits, this research is exceptionally interdisciplinary. The scholar at the forefront was Ronnie Ellenblum (1952-2021), whose work *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean* brought the hypothesis to wider attention.⁷⁶ In more recent years, John Haldon has examined Ellenblum's hypothesis with regard specifically to the Byzantine situation.⁷⁷ Whilst Ellenblum's thesis has taken some criticism in the past decade, the matter is certainly not settled yet, and academic discussions on the role of climate in the events of the High Medieval Eastern Mediterranean remain ongoing.⁷⁸

These studies – Jacoby, Shepard, Lau, Khvalkov – remain the forefront of Euxine research. Analysis of the Black Sea and its peoples remains limited, especially beyond the Byzantine world. Georgian, Qipjaq and Seljuq connections with the Sea are especially understudied. However, historiographical trends suggest that this may not be such a pronounced issue in the future; and indeed, this thesis intends to go some way towards rectifying this problem.

⁷⁶ Ronnie Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁷⁷ John Haldon et al., 'The Climate and Environment of Byzantine Anatolia: Integrating Science, History and Archaeology', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 45 (2014), 113-161; Haldon, John F., 'Some thoughts on Climate Change, Local Environment and Grain Production in Byzantine Northern Anatolia'. *Late Antique Archaeology* 12 (2018), 18-24.

⁷⁸ Discussion of Ellenblum's argument can be found in Chapter 3, beginning on page 114.

iii. Difficulties and limitations of thesis

A thesis of this breadth naturally has to deal with many impediments, including significantly limitations of source material, language barriers, and historiographical obstacles.

First it is necessary to mention briefly the problems of the relevant body of source material, which is rather limited. Accounts of the region to the North-East of the Black Sea are few and far between. This is in part a consequence of the non-literate societies which lived in the area at this time – there are a few Russian sources, but the lives of the Qipjaqs and Pechenegs, among other local societies, are largely recorded in other cultures' histories. As noted above, the most literate society in this area was, of course, the Byzantine Empire. However, the writers of the Empire cared little for geography and exploration. Even accounts of the Holy Land “are so few in Greek before the fifteenth-sixteenth century that they can be counted on the fingers of one hand”.⁷⁹ Instead, Byzantinists wishing to study the Black Sea are left to rely largely on oblique references from letters or histories, the occasional treaty or Chrysobull, and a 9th-century Hagiography of St. Andrew.

Latin-European sources which relate to the Euxine are also few, though comparatively more common. Western Europeans viewed the Medieval Black Sea, even during its boom years, as, if not the actual end of the earth, at the very least the outer edge of civilization. The later Genoese colony of Caffa (modern Feodosia), though closer to Italy and the West than the Sea of Azov, was still commonly described as “*in extremo Europa*”.⁸⁰ As a result, most of our sources are those of missionaries and explorers, searching for the King of the Tartars, “Greater Hungary”, Prester John, or similar. There are a few notable exceptions: limited use can be made of various *mappamundi*, and, rather serendipitously (depending on one's perspective), the accounts of the Fourth Crusade, which reached

⁷⁹ Cyril Mango, ‘A Journey Round the Coast of the Black Sea in the Ninth Century’, *Palaeoslavica* X.1 (2002), 255.

⁸⁰ Serena Ferente, ‘*In Extremo Europae*: The Genoese colonies in Crimea before and after 1453’, paper presented to Medieval Studies Society, Institute of Historical Research, London, February 9 2016.

the entrance of the Black Sea in 1203-4; Villehardouin's account is the most useful of those records.⁸¹

Given the relative scarcity of these surviving sources, it is frustratingly ironic that only a century later Marco Polo declined to write about the Black Sea: "for after all it is very well known to many people!"⁸²

The greatest wealth of source material is probably that of the numerous Arab geographers. Various geographical dictionaries, gazetteers and the like were produced, some of which cover the relevant region; however, not all of these have survived intact, and those which have are not always translated (either completely or even partially). In addition, there are various accounts of travellers who headed northwards to investigate the Caucasus, Russia, and the Caspian Sea. Mas'ūdī, Al-Bakri, Ibn Rustah, and Ibn Battuta, among others, all provide some insight into the region under investigation.⁸³ However, given the nature of these Arabic accounts, just as with those of Western Europe, such information as they give on the region is often noted briefly, often literally in passing, and is seldom clear. As a result, one cannot simply rely on the information given in the text, but instead, creative interpretation of all of these sources is often necessary.

As always seems to be the case for medieval historians, there is a dearth of written primary material. Whilst it is true that written sources are available in significant quantities from the Byzantine Empire, these tend to focus on military and political affairs, and the happenings of the capital city. It is rare to find a mention of the Black Sea, or of mercantile matters, with which the Byzantines were stereotypically disinterested, and rarer still to find mentions of the regions bordering the Black Sea beyond Byzantine control. However, one source which will be referenced time and again throughout this thesis is *De Administrando Imperio*, written by the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetos some

⁸¹ It is worth noting that since portolans would not be in use for about another century, thus *mappamundi* are our only contemporary western cartographical source.

⁸² Marco Polo, *The Description of the World*, ed. A. C. Moule and Paul Pelliot (London: Routledge, 1938), vol. 2, 131; Marco Polo, *The Travels*, translated by R. E. Latham (London, Penguin, 1958), 335.

⁸³ These accounts are available in Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, ed. Charles Pellat (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962); *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab travellers in the Far North*, trans. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (Penguin, 2012); M. Defrémery, 'Fragments de géographes et d'historiens Arabes et Persans inédits relatifs aux anciens peuples du Caucase et de la Russie méridionale', *Journal Asiatique* (4th Series) 13 (1849), 357-522; Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*.

time before his death in 959.⁸⁴ Although this source does predate the period under examination in this thesis, it nonetheless remains highly informative for the topic at hand. Written with the manifest aim of helping his son, the future emperor Romanos II, in his management of the empire, it provides a unique insight into the aims and resources of Byzantine foreign and domestic policy, especially with regards to the Black Sea. Porphyrogenetos gives details on all the non-Byzantine nations living around the Black Sea's coast, discusses the economic and strategic value of various imperial cities and regions, and even how best to tame some of the more habitually rebellious Euxine cities. Thus, despite its slightly earlier dating, its potential as a source for the history of Byzantine diplomatic and economic history in the Euxine is unparalleled.

Porphyrogenetos aside, however, the Byzantine literary record can feel frustratingly thin. The other peoples of the Euxine also wrote little. The Rus' legacy consists of the *Primary Chronicle*, the *Paterik* of the Kievan Caves Monastery, and a law code; the Georgian legacy rests almost entirely upon the *Kartlis* annals. Both the Rus' and the Georgians did, however, leave a few 'incidentals', most famously poetry in the epic tradition – for example *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, which remains a staple of Georgian culture to this day. The Seljuqs and Qipjaqs, however, leave nothing written whatsoever.

As a result, it has been necessary to cast my net more widely. Thus, I have drawn upon written sources from wider locales – German ecclesiastical works, Spanish travel accounts, Icelandic sagas, Italian contracts, and more besides. In addition, much has been made of unwritten works – archaeology not just from around the Black Sea itself, but far beyond, such as the Baltic and even British Isles. Numismatic, sigillographic and paleobiologic evidence has all been employed in order to further our understanding of the medieval Euxine. Naturally, there are – and will always be – gaps in the primary evidence, which no amount of creative source interpretation or protracted searching will ever fill;

⁸⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, trans. R. J. H. Jenkins. (Washington, D. C., *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 1, 1967).

some questions will always remain unanswered. Nonetheless, the breadth of source material employed has enabled many of these problems to be, to an extent, resolved.

As far as secondary material, there have been two historiographical problems. The first of these was that, during the Cold War, the Iron Curtain created two separate academic schools. On the one hand, USSR historians had access to the archaeology and geography; on the other, western academics had access to many of the written sources. However, the division between the two sets of historians was significant, and it was not until after the fall of the Berlin wall that the two schools were able to work together. Fortunately, this is no longer such a difficulty, as the majority of previously inaccessible histories are now available to me; nonetheless, the invasion and subsequent occupation of the Crimea in 2014 by the Russian Federation has caused some similar difficulties.

A second difficulty comes specifically from Georgian sources. As noted in the preface, the unique characteristics of the Georgian alphabet, combined with the complexity and utter unfamiliarity to me of that language, has limited the range of sources available to me for this thesis. As a result, for the vast majority of Georgian sources, I was obliged to rely on secondary material, or material in translation. This comes with a corollary problem. During the period under consideration in this thesis, the region of Georgia underwent a dramatic rejuvenation, growing from a collection of fractured petty princedoms which were largely satellites of the Byzantine Empire, into a powerful, united and truly independent regional power, which could impose its will on neighbouring states. This, coupled with a cultural renaissance epitomised by the epic poem *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* has led to typification of this period as Georgia's 'Golden Age'. As a result, many of the Georgian histories which have been translated into English have a significant nationalist leaning, and tend to be light on footnotes. Such sources are, of course, not ideal, but as they were all that was available, they have, by necessity been used – with the necessary caution.

iv. Argument of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the trade patterns of the Black Sea, and incorporate it within the larger economic spheres to which it belongs, during the two centuries before the fall of Constantinople in 1204. This will be done in three parts.

The first section will examine the Black Sea's connection to Mediterranean trade (the subject of most Euxine historiography) by exploring the possibility of Italian merchants' involvement in the region during this time. This chapter will centre around the "Rhōsia and Matracha" clause of the 1169 Chrysobull granted to the Genoese by the Byzantine Emperor, which imposed a unique limitation upon the Genoese merchants regarding trade in Byzantium. The meaning of Rhōsia and Matracha will be explored, and the importance of those locations explained. In turn, this will allow the comparison of the Byzantine relationships with the Genoese and the Venetians, and an integration of the Black Sea with Byzantine diplomacy and foreign policy. The geopolitical importance of the Black Sea will be demonstrated through the impact which it had on Byzantine-Italian diplomatic relations.

The second section will explore economic relationships within the Black Sea itself, focussed on the urban hub of Constantinople – the maritime trade networks which connected those dwelling around the coast of the Sea themselves. This will be done through an exploration of the essential commodity of grain – where it was grown, where it was bought and sold (and where it was not), and how it travelled. The impact of the Seljuq arrival will be examined, as will the role of the Georgian 'Golden Age' and the alleged exports from the fertile northern regions of the Kievan Rus'. As a result, a clear picture of the 'day-to-day' trade patterns of the Euxine sailors will be drawn.

The third section will integrate the Black Sea into larger, transcontinental economic spheres. By examining unique luxury goods – silk, furs, religious artefacts, and others – we will be able to trace the extended tendrils of the Euxine to their furthest reaches. It will be demonstrated that the merchants of the Black Sea connected markets as far afield as Britain and Iceland to the northwest, to the Sultanate of Delhi in the south-east. The Black Sea will be revealed as an important "turntable of

international trade” at a much earlier period – whilst not humming with quite as much activity as during its later mercantile peak, it was nonetheless clearly an important mercantile entity at a significantly earlier period than previously appreciated.

In conclusion, it will be seen that the Black Sea, far from being an obscure and largely irrelevant ‘Byzantine lake’, was in fact a thriving economic community, part of many worlds – the Mediterranean, the Byzantine, and beyond. The Sea was part of the itinerary of far-flung merchants, transporting both essential and luxury items to markets near and far; as a result, it played a substantial role in the economic and diplomatic life of those nations which lived on its shores, and those far beyond. In short, this earlier Black Sea was – in a word – important. The economic and political histories of those who dwelt around its waters cannot be understood without a proper understanding of what was happening in those waters. This thesis intends to provide such understanding.

2. The Mediterranean Black Sea:

The Matracha Clause and Byzantine Foreign Policy

An important step in understanding the status of the Black Sea during this period, both politically and economically, is assessing its relationship with the rest of the Mediterranean, and in particular any connections that existed with the rising commercial enterprises of the Italian merchant-republics of Genoa and Venice. A key text for any such assessment is the 1169 Chrysobull issued by Manuel I Komnenos, setting out the privileges which he granted to Genoese merchants trading within his empire, and their associated responsibilities. Of particular importance for this study is the so-called “Rhōsia and Matracha clause”, which runs as follows:

Genoese ships are able to safely trade in all the regions under my control,
excepting Rhōsia and Matracha, unless given express permission by my Majesty.⁸⁵

The difficulty in assessing this clause is a simple one – it is unclear to what “Rhōsia and Matracha” actually refers. Without knowing that, it is impossible to understand why this clause was inserted into the Chrysobull, why the Genoese appealed against it, though unsuccessfully, in later years, or what this clause represents with regard to the greater picture of the Black Sea in the pre-boom years, before the Silk Road reached the Sea of Azov.

⁸⁵ *M&M*, vol. 3, 35. Translation and emphasis mine. The treaty exists in several versions, with slight differences between each of them; see Appendix 2 (on page 231) for the complete clauses from each of these texts. This translation based on the sole Greek-language copy.

It should be noted that the Greek copy is only preserved in a later Chrysobull, which quotes the original one (presumably) verbatim. It is possible that this Greek version is in fact a translation from a Latin version, meaning that the text has gone through two translators. With this in mind, the author of “Rhōsia and Matracha” may have been Italian-Genoese rather than Greek. The manuscripts in question have not been investigated since the 19th century, and no doubt would benefit from a new, more modern, analysis. I have opted not to do this myself, in part due to the practical difficulty in obtaining access to the manuscripts, and the lack of the necessary time to perform the painstaking inspection which would be necessary for a just analysis, but also due to the fact that I do not, as of writing this thesis, have the necessary palaeographical skill to approach such a task. As a result, I believe that I would not myself be able to obtain any new, reliable insight into the manuscripts, and have opted to restrict my analysis to the already-published and available documents.

This chapter will assess the historiographical arguments regarding this clause, and, through contextual evidence and comparison with other sources, identify the actual location of Rhōsia and Matracha. Two main hypotheses have been proposed as to how best to interpret the phrase 'Rhōsia and Matracha'. The original proposal, advanced by Brătianu, suggests that this clause refers to the Black Sea as a whole. However, as shall be seen, there is little evidence to support that definition, and is not consistent with the evidence which is currently known. A more recent argument, championed by Nystazopolou-Pelekidis, asserts that 'Rhōsia and Matracha' specifically refers to a pair of towns approximately corresponding to modern Kerch and Taman, respectively. This would mean that the Genoese were able to trade in the Black Sea, but not the Sea of Azov.⁸⁶ This is a more influential argument, but is inaccurate; while Matracha has been correctly identified, its counterpart, Rhōsia, has not. As I shall demonstrate, Rhōsia cannot properly be identified with Kerch, but in fact is a separate town elsewhere in the region. Its precise location is unknown; however, I will propose a possible site. Having identified the locations discussed in the Rhōsia and Matracha clause, it will then be interpreted in the context of Byzantine foreign policy, to establish the reason for its inclusion in the 1169 Chrysobull. The distinction between Venice and Genoa, from the Byzantine viewpoint, will be shown: Genoa could not be regarded as a reliable ally against either the threat posed either by Norman Sicily, or the Holy Roman Empire.

Finally, there will be an examination of the possibility of Italian mercantile activity in the Black Sea prior to the Fourth Crusade. There are circumstantial indications which suggest that the Genoese and Venetians were most likely to have had an interest in the region, and arguments that they explicitly did *not* trade in the Black Sea before the Fall of Constantinople are insufficient. Nonetheless, evidence

⁸⁶ Marie Nystazopolou-Pelekidis, 'Venise et la Mer Noire du XIe au XVe siècle', *Thesaurismata* 7 (1970), 15-51, especially 19. A similar argument was earlier advanced in N. Bănescu, 'La domination byzantine a Matracha (Tmutorokan), en Zichie, en Khazarie et en Russie a l'époque des Comnènes', *Académie Roumaine, bulletin de la Section Historique*, 22 (1940-41), 18-19. However, here Bănescu still regarded Rhōsia as a region at the mouth of the Don, rather than specifically a town as Nystazopolou-Pelekidis suggested.

for any Italian activity in the Euxine during this period is scanty and unusual, and ultimately inadequate for any conclusive proof of their involvement.

i. Let's put this place on the map! – Locating the missing towns of the 1169 Chrysobull

The first step in properly interpreting the 1169 Chrysobull is establishing what the phrase “Rhōsia and Matracha” actually referred to. We shall first examine previous historiographical claims, and their shortcomings, before comparing contemporary evidence in order to establish the exact locations of Rhōsia and Matracha.

The Brătianu Hypothesis

The first historian to deal with the Byzantine Black Sea in general, and its connections with Italian states in particular, was Gheorghe I. Brătianu. In 1929 he wrote of this clause:

Il est assez probable que ces noms [Rossia et Matracha] signifient la “mer de Russie” (la mer Noire) et celle de Matracha ou de Taman (la mer d’Azov), ce qui revenait à interdire aux Génois le passage du Bosphore.⁸⁷

Unfortunately, this claim, like many others in Brătianu’s vanguard work, went unsubstantiated, being taken as self-evident; thus it was (and is) cited uncritically by reputable scholars – understandably, as, on the face of it, the proposal is quite reasonable. The Black Sea is, in fact, often referred to as “the Sea of Russia” by medieval sources. Later followers of Brătianu have often cited the relevant example of Geoffrey de Villehardouin, a minor leader of the Fourth Crusade who recorded an account of the ill-starred expedition to Constantinople.⁸⁸ In his *Conquête de Constantinople (1207)*⁸⁹, he uses the

⁸⁷ Brătianu, *Recherches sur le Commerce Génois*, 50.

⁸⁸ One such follower would be Balard, *La Romanie Génoise (XIIIe-Début du XVe Siècle)*, vol. 1, 28-9. However, more current specialised historiography, in Jacoby’s view, has “decisively rejected” Brătianu’s arguments, for some of the reasons discussed here; nonetheless, the argument still is repeated on occasion. David Jacoby, ‘Byzantium, The Italian Maritime Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204’, 677.

⁸⁹ Due to the wide-ranging location and time-period covered by the primary sources referred to (by necessity), I have included dates and locations at their first mention in the text. Unless otherwise specified, date is

phrase “la Mer de Rosie” to refer to the Black Sea.⁹⁰ Nor is this an exceptional phrase. Similar variations on “Sea of Russia” can be found in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* (Kiev, 11th-12th centuries), Albert of Aachen (fl. 1100), Ekkehard of Aura (Bavaria, d. 1126), Helmold of Bosau (near Plön, 12th century), and Benjamin of Tudela (Spain, late 12th century). Some Arab geographers also use variations of the phrase; for example, Mas’ūdī (Baghdad, 932), Al-Dimisqi, (Syria, 1325) and Ibn al-Wardi (c.1332).⁹¹

There are two important things to be noted about this nomenclature. Firstly, that “Russia” is always paired with “sea” – “θαλασσα”, “Mare”, “Bahr”, *et al.* – when referring to the Black Sea. Contrastingly in the chrysobull, the word “Ρωσία” stands alone – there is no accompanying word meaning ‘sea’.⁹² Thus the implication that ‘Rhōsia’ and ‘Sea of Russia’ refer to the same region is already distinctly questionable.

Secondly, though it may appear commonplace, the phrase “Sea of Russia” in reference to the Black Sea was far from universal, either in the West or in Arabic literature. The Hereford *Mappamundi* (c.1300) refers to the Black and Azov Seas as the Euxine and Maeotides respectively, as does the Cotton Tiberius Map (Canterbury, early 11th Century).⁹³ William of Rubruck (Flanders, 1253-5) talks

approximate date of writing, and location is the modern equivalent. For travellers, their hometown or (if known) place of composition is given.

⁹⁰ Geoffrey de Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, ed. Edmond Faral, 2nd edition (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1961), 24-27.

⁹¹ Alexandre Soloviev, ‘Domination byzantine ou russe au Nord de la Mer Noire à l’époque des Comnènes?’, in *Byzance et la formation de l’Etat russe* (Variorum: London, 1979), 574; Jonathan Shepard, ‘Closer Encounters with the Byzantine World: The Rus at the Straits of Kerch’, in *Pre-Modern Russia and its World: Essays in Honour of Thomas S. Noonan*, ed. Kathryn L. Reyerson, Theofanis G. Stavrou and James D. Tacy (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 19; *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1953), 53; Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana*, ed. and trans. Susan B. Edgington (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007), 526-7; Helmold of Bosau, *Cronica Slavorum*, ed. Bernhardus Schmeidler, (Hannover: Bibliopolii, 1909), 6; Benjamin of Tudela, *Itinerarium*, (Forni: Bologna, 1967), 28; Ekkehard of Aura, ‘Chronica’, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* 6, ed. G. H Pertz, (New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1963), 216; Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 136-7.

Soloviev also believes the phrase was used by “Poeta Saxo” and Anthony of Novgorod; however, I have not been able to confirm such usage.

⁹² This may seem a small difference, but the importance of such an omission can be seen, for example, in the difference between ‘Japan’ and ‘Sea of Japan’, two distinct areas with names which cannot be used interchangeably.

⁹³ Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, 104-5, 136-7, 390-1; *Cotton Tiberius B. V. Part 1: An eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon illustrated Miscellany*, ed. P. McGurk, D. N. Dumville, M. R. Godden and Ann Knock (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1983), 87-8.

about “*Mare Ponti, quod Bulgarici vocant, Maius Mare*”.⁹⁴ Friar Giovanni Di Plano Carpini (Perugia, 1245-7) refers to “*mare Graeciae, quod dicitur Magnum mare*”.⁹⁵ Similarly, Arabic sources use different names for the Black Sea with “Russian Sea” being a comparative rarity. Mas’ūdī talks about “Bahr Buntus” (i.e. Sea of Pontus), although he does say that it was “also called the Sea of the Rus”.⁹⁶ An anonymous Persian geographer of the 10th century uses the name “Sea of the Georgians”.⁹⁷ Other geographers use variants of the modern name “Black Sea”, among them Ibn Rustah (Persia, c. 903-913).⁹⁸

Importantly, in Byzantine sources (which, given the provenance of the chrysobull, are presumably the most illuminating for our purposes), the nomenclature of “Sea of Russia” is entirely unused. The *Alexiad* (Constantinople, 1148) refers to the Euxine Pontus (Εὐξείνως Πόντος), as does Niketas Choniates’ *History* (Constantinople, c.1207).⁹⁹ His brother, Michael Choniates, also refers to both Pontus and Euxine, but uses the terms separately, while Eustathios of Thessalonica refers purely to the Euxine.¹⁰⁰ This may be partially attributed to the tendency of classicizing Byzantines to adopt antique and outdated terms in their writing, in order to better emulate their great predecessors; however, we should not be lax and lean on that argument too heavily. In *De Administrando Imperio*

⁹⁴ *The Texts and Versions of John de Plano Carpini and William de Rubruquis*, ed. C. Raymond Beazley (London: Hakluyt Society, 1903), 144; William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His journey to the court of Great Khan Möngke 1253-55*, trans. Peter Jackson (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 61

⁹⁵ Friar Giovanni Di Plano Carpini, *The Story of the Mongols whom we call the Tartars*, trans. Erik Hildinger (Boston, MA: Branden, 1996), 99-100; *The Texts and Versions*, ed. Beazley, 95.

⁹⁶ Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 136-7.

⁹⁷ *Hudūd al-‘Ālam*, 53. This is an unusual choice, since, although the Sea does indeed form the Georgian coastline, there appears to have been no significant Georgian maritime activity during this period, a topic which is given more discussion in chapter 2, on pages 148-9.

William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 61 n1.

⁹⁸ Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Lands of Darkness*, 122.

⁹⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, ed. H.-G. Beck, A. Kambylis, and R. Keydell (Berlin: *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 40, 2001), 19; Choniates, *Historiae*, 528.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Choniates technically refers to the “regions of the Pontos” (“Ποντικῶν ... τοῖς κλίμασιν”), rather than the sea itself; however, the context, with its references to Hyperboreans and Tauroscythians clearly indicates that the author is referring not to the Anatolian Pontos, but the Black Sea. Michael Choniates, *Epistulae*, ed. Walter de Gruyter (Berlin: *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 41, 2001), 6 l. 32 and 7 l. 14; Eustathios of Thessalonica, *De Emendanda Vita Monachia*, ed and trans. Karin Metzler (Berlin: *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 45, 2006), 80.

(Constantinople, c.950), Emperor Constantine Porphyrogennetos uses several names, most commonly “Pontos” or “Pontic Sea”; he may also have been the first to use the phrase “Black Sea”.¹⁰¹ Other Byzantine writers also use the name “Pontos” for the Black Sea, as in a letter from Michael Choniates (brother of the more famous Niketas) to Constantine Pegonites written before 1182.¹⁰² Clearly, “Euxine” and/or “Pontos” are the most common Byzantine name for the Black Sea. However, most damning of all for Brătianu’s position is a eulogy for Alexios I Komnenos (c.1118), which mentions militarily-recovered lands, “starting from Cilicia and reaching to the Colchian boundaries on our [*i.e. Byzantine*] sea”.¹⁰³ Given this evidence, it would thus be exceptional indeed for an official text such as the Chrysobull, dealing explicitly with matters of diplomacy and sovereignty, to cede control, even if only linguistically, of the entire Black Sea, such an important body of water right on the imperial doorstep. Thus the proposal that “Rhōsia” could refer to the Black Sea is unconvincing.

If “Rhōsia” did not refer to the sea, we must consider what other regions it could refer to – and there are many indeed. In various sources, “Rhōsia” (or variations on such a name) is either used jointly with, or used to refer to, “Dacia”;¹⁰⁴ “Gothia”;¹⁰⁵ modern Romania;¹⁰⁶ the Crimea (and possibly further);¹⁰⁷ the plains of the river Dnieper;¹⁰⁸ the expanse from Prague to Kiev;¹⁰⁹ and an ill-defined

¹⁰¹ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 152, 182 & 286. “Ἡ δὲ θάλασσα... ἐστὶν ἡ λεγομένη σκοτεινὴ”; “And the sea ...is that which is called ‘dark’ ”. This nomenclature is a *hapax legomenon*, at least in Porphyrogennetos’ works. William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 61 n1.

¹⁰² Alexander Kazhdan, ‘Some Little-Known or Misinterpreted Evidence about Kievan Rus’ in Twelfth-Century Greek Sources’, in *OKEANOS – Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students.*, Harvard Ukrainian Studies 7 (1983), 349.

¹⁰³ Jonathan Shepard, ‘Another New England? Anglo Saxon Settlement on the Black Sea’, *Byzantine Studies* 1.1 (1974), 22; P. Gautier, ‘Le Dossier d’un Haut Fonctionnaire d’Alexis Ier Comnène, Manuel Straboromanos’, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 23 (1965), 190-191.

¹⁰⁴ Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, 198-9

¹⁰⁵ Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, 199 n1; Cotton *Tiberius*, 87-8.

¹⁰⁶ *Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte, Band I: Atlas*, ed. Hartmut Kugler (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), 102-3

¹⁰⁷ William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 62.

¹⁰⁸ *Inter alia*, Carpini, *The Story of the Mongols*, 99-100; Rabbi Petachia, *Travels of Rabbi Petachia*, 3. There are others; this is one of the more common regions described as Russia

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, ed. and trans. Marcus Nathan Adler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), 80.

stretch of land running from at least Novgorod to Chernigov.¹¹⁰ In short, “Rhōsia” could refer to everywhere from the western shores of Lithuania to the eastern shores of the Volga, or beyond. Rhōsia when referring to a region, is simply the ‘great white north’ – undefined, and undefinable.¹¹¹ It is no coincidence that references to the region of Rhōsia are seldom far from descriptions of Gog and Magog, the mythical peoples walled off to the north, who await release at the end of days.¹¹² With such varied attributions of Rhōsia, it is hard to accept without any supporting evidence that its use in the chrysobull refers specifically to the Black Sea.

The final nail in the coffin of Brătianu’s theory is an examination of his claim that “Matracha” or “Sea of Matracha” is used in other sources to refer to the Sea of Azov. There are simply no examples of such usage; Brătianu was simply extrapolating from his initial assumption. Overall, in his examination of the Rhōsia and Matracha clause, we find a rare example of Brătianu not being vigorous enough in his interrogation of the evidence. We are thus left with a theory that is all but baseless, and is perpetuated only due to Brătianu’s academic reputation. We must therefore seek an alternative.

The Nystazopolou-Pelekidis Argument

A more recent and compelling proposal is that “Rhōsia and Matracha” does not refer to nebulous northern regions, which would indeed be an ambiguous terminology which would be of little use in an important and actionable treaty, but in fact to specific towns of strategic and economic importance. This theory, argued prominently in an article by Nystazopolou-Pelekidis, identifies Rhōsia with

¹¹⁰ Omeljan Pritsak, ‘Where was Constantine’s inner Rus’?, *Okeanos 7 – Essays presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students* (1983), 557.

¹¹¹ It is because of such nebulous use of the term, that the uncritical argument of historians, such as Lamma, that ‘Rhōsia’ is equivalent to ‘Russia’, is particularly lax. Whilst Lamma goes into substantial detail on Genoese-Byzantine diplomacy, he offers no comment on the Matracha clause, despite its unusual nature, referring to it only in six words. Whilst acknowledging that ‘Matraca’ was an unclear location, Lamma falsely equates Rhōsia and Russia based only (presumably) on the similarity of the terms. Even if we were to accept such an equivalence, the range of regions which could be referred to by ‘Russia’ nonetheless would oblige further investigation as to what is actually referred to by the text. Paolo Lamma, *Comneni e Staufer: Ricerche sui Rapporti fra Bisanzio e l’Occidente nel Secolo XII*, (Rome: Istituto storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1955), vol. 2, 188.

¹¹² For example, see William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 139 & 261, where the tribes are discussed but strangely not explicitly named.

modern-day Kerch, and Matracha with a now-defunct town on the Taman Peninsula, roughly near modern-day Temryuk.¹¹³ Such an interpretation allows for the Genoese to be allowed to trade in the Black Sea, but excluded from the Sea of Azov. This theory is the most influential in modern scholarship, and is at least half-right. The identification of Matracha with a town on the eastern shore of the Cimmerian Bosporos is almost certainly accurate; the identification of Rhōsia with Kerch, however, is more dubious.

It is almost certain that Matracha is the same town as Taman/Tmutorokan, as mentioned in numerous other sources. This identification is not as linguistically unlikely as it may superficially appear. “Tmutorokan” is variously written as “Tamatarakan” or “Tamatarcha”, with the latter spelling making the identifying etymological link with “Matracha” more visibly apparent.¹¹⁴ Moreover, literary sources place Matracha in the appropriate location. For example, William of Rubruck’s description of the Crimean Peninsula ends thus: “And on the eastern side of this territory lies a city called Matracha, where the river Tanais [*the Don*] flows down into the Sea of Pontus through an estuary twelve miles wide”.¹¹⁵ The same approximate location is also attested by a report from some Hungarian Dominicans who visited the region c.1236: “after three-and-thirty days from entering the [Black] Sea we landed in a land which is called Zichia, in the town which is called Matracha”.¹¹⁶

Most importantly, there is physical evidence for this identification. Outside the modern town of Taman are some medieval ruins, in which was found an interesting artefact: the plinth of a statue, which

¹¹³ See Nystazopolou-Pelekidis, ‘Venise et la Mer Noire’, 15-51. This latter town has several variations on what is in essence the same name – Matracha, Matrica, Tamatarcha, and Tmutarokan, among others.

Martin in fact traces the origin of this argument back to 1906, in the work of Adolf Schaube, *Handelsgeschichte der Romnischen Völker des Mittelmeergebiets bis zum Ende der Kreuzzüge* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1906), 238-9. However, Schaube’s work was overshadowed by Brătianu. Martin, ‘The First Venetians in the Black Sea’, 115.

¹¹⁴ It is possible that ‘Matracha’ derives from a Hellenic mishearing of ‘Tamatracha’ as ‘Τά Ματράχα’ or ‘Τὸ Ματράχα’, with the first syllable being misunderstood as some variation of the definite article. Pleasing though this theory is, it is no more than speculation, and almost certainly unprovable. For etymology of the name of this town, see G. Schramm, *Alt Russlands Anfang. Historische Schlüssel aus Namen, Wörtern und Texten zum 9 Und 10 Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach Wissenschaften Reihe Historiae, 2002), 12.

¹¹⁵ William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 64.

¹¹⁶ H. Dorrie, ed, ‘Drei Texte zur Geschichte der Ungarn und Mongolen’, *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, phil. Hist. Kl.* 6 (1956), 152-3.

records an inscription ordered in the winter of 1067-8 by Gleb Sviatoslavich, then-ruler of the town, which declares Sviatoslavich's (supposedly) personal measurement of "the sea across the ice from Tmutarakan to Korchev".¹¹⁷ Korchev is an early rendering of the name "Kerch", a name which had been in use for some time before this inscription was carved; Ibn Rustah, writer of a seven-volume encyclopaedia of historical and geographical knowledge in the early 900s, makes mention of a Black Sea port in Byzantine territory named "Karkh", which appears to be the earliest extant variant of this name.¹¹⁸ Therefore the "sea across the ice" must be the Straits of Kerch.¹¹⁹ Once again, we have evidence for Matracha being a coastal town on the eastern side the Cimmerian Bosphoros, roughly opposite modern-day Kerch. Given the overwhelming evidence for such an identification, and lack of opposing evidence, we can safely locate "Matracha" on the Taman Peninsula.

Locating Rhōsia is more difficult. A key text for the Nystazopolou-Pelekidis interpretation, that Rhōsia is equivalent to modern Kerch, is the 'The Book of Pleasant Journeys into Faraway Lands', also known, more succinctly, as the *Kitab Rujar*, or 'Book of Roger', by the Arab geographer Al-Idrisi; commissioned by Roger II of Sicily in 1138, the text took 15 years to compile, and was originally accompanied by a map etched in precious silver. Although this complete map was soon lost, the text also includes smaller, regional maps, accompanying each section, the manuscript copies of which were united into a single, larger map by Konrad Miller in 1928.¹²⁰ Importantly, Al-Idrisi's work is one of the few sources to specifically mention Rhōsia as a town. When describing the route between Constantinople and Matracha, along the coast of the Black Sea, Al-Idrisi writes:

¹¹⁷ Shepard, 'Closer encounters', 53; B. A. Rybakov, *Русские Датированные Надписи XI-XIV веков* ['Russian Dated Inscriptions of the 11th-14th Centuries'], (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), 16-8, & fig 1-2 (Plate 8).

¹¹⁸ Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 122-3.

¹¹⁹ Shepard, 'Closer encounters', 53.

¹²⁰ Nystazopolou-Pelekidis, 'Venise et la Mer Noire', 19; Balard, *La Romanie Génoise*, vol. 1, 28-9, n.1; S. Maqbul Ahmad, 'Cartography of al-Sharif al-Idrisi', in *The History of Cartography* vol. 2, bk. 1, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 156-8; Konrad Miller, *Weltkarte des Idrisi vom Jarn. Chr., Charta Rogeriana*. A high-resolution copy of the resulting map is viewable from the US Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3200.ct001903/>.

From the city of Matracha to the city of Rhōsia [is] 26 miles. The city of Rhōsia is near a certain great river [*likely the Don*] which flows down from the Cocaia mountains.¹²¹

Given the lack of other sources mentioning the town Rhōsia, many authors rely on Al-Idrisi for confirmation of its existence and location. It certainly seems to fit with the 1169 chrysobull, linking Rhōsia and Matracha conveniently. However, basing such an identification upon this “imprecise” text of Al-Idrisi has been criticised, and reasonably so.¹²² Whilst Al-Idrisi is exceptionally knowledgeable about a great deal of his geography, his description and map of the Black Sea are vaguer than the rest of his work; although he was well travelled, Al-Idrisi does not seem to have ever made it as far as the Black Sea himself, instead likely relying on the oral accounts of merchants and sailors who had visited the region.¹²³ Lilie goes as far as suggesting that his coverage of the Black Sea suggests “eine Ausschmückung durch den autor denken läßt, der seine dürftigen Vorlagen so etwas interessanter zu machen hoffte”, a valid but uncharitable position, with which I disagree.¹²⁴ However, it cannot be denied that Al-Idrisi’s portrayal is inaccurate in places. For example, the Sea of Azov is omitted from his map and description, instead viewed as an exceptional widening of the Don River (in a similar manner to the Hereford Map, among others).¹²⁵ A more important criticism is that Al-Idrisi’s numbers do not add up. This can be seen if we identify Rhōsia with Kerch, and then attempt to apply the following distances from Al-Idrisi: that the distance from Rhōsia to Matracha is 26 miles; that from

¹²¹ Al-Idrisi, *Opus Geographicum*, ed. E Cerulli *et al.* (Naples: E. J. Brill, 1984), 916. “Cocaia” may refer to the Caucasus Mountains; however, if this was Al-Idrisi’s intent, he would be incorrect, as the Don originates much farther north.

¹²² Balard, *La Romanie Génoise*, 28-29 n1.

¹²³ I. G. Коновалова, ‘Город Росия / Русийа в 12 в.’ [‘The Town of Rhōsia/Russia in the 12th Century’], *Византийские Очеки* (Aleteiya, 2001), 133-4.

¹²⁴ Lilie, *Handel und Politik*, 133 n1.

¹²⁵ Al-Idrisi, *Charta Rogeriana – Weltkarte des Idrisi – vom Jahr 1154*, ed. Konrad Miller (Stuttgart: Konrad Miller 1928); Westrem, *Hereford Map*, 136-9.

Matracha to the mouth of the straits (referred to as the “River Rhōsia”) is 20 miles; and that from Rhōsia to “Botre” is 20 miles.¹²⁶

Whilst the distance between Kerch/Rhōsia and Matracha could be approximately accurate, it is impossible to then make these other distances fit. “Botre” is commonly identified with Feodosia, a town which is 60 miles away from Kerch— clearly impossible given Al-Idrisi’s numbers. Moreover, given that Rhōsia is supposed to be on the mouth of the river of the same name, we are given an impossibility that it is both 20 and 26 miles from Matracha. Furthermore, Sviatoslavich’s measurement of the Kerch-Matracha distance, presumably the most accurate, is approximately 11 miles; this fits for the location of the existing ruins, but cannot accord with the distances Al-Idrisi provides, which would require Matracha to have been located on the Euxine coast of the peninsula, in the vicinity of modern Veselovka.¹²⁷ Confusion abounds, and trigonometry fails. We are therefore left with Al-Idrisi providing at best a fuzzy picture of the Black Sea’s northern coast, and any attempt to use his text to identify Rhōsia with Kerch is questionable.

Old Wine in a New Bottle: Revisiting Imperial sources with an eye to the Black Sea

Al-Idrisi is not the only author to mention the town of Rhōsia. Instead, we should look at another text— *De Administrando Imperio*, by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetos (c. 952). The key chapter here is fulsomely entitled

¹²⁶ Al-Idrisi, *Opus Geographicum*, 909 & 916. Al-Idrisi’s “mile” was certainly not identical to a modern mile; however, the difference between the modern standard and Al-Idrisi’s “*mele*” is minimal, and certainly within the usual margin of error that must be granted when dealing with such historical sources.

¹²⁷ Taman is on the north-western side of the Taman peninsula, facing the Sea of Azov; Veselovka is a smaller village approximately 13 miles away to the south-east, on a ‘tendrill’ of the peninsula, facing the Black Sea proper. See the Map 2 in Appendix 1, on page 224 .

It should be noted that the soft and moveable soils of the Azov region have almost certainly shifted significantly in the intervening 9 centuries between Al-Idrisi and the present; nonetheless, the survival of the medieval ruins near Taman with their accompanying plinth suggest that it is far more likely that Al-Idrisi’s distances are incorrect.

Geographical description from Thessalonica ... and to the Chazar city of Sarkel and Russia and to the Nekropyla, that are in the sea of Pontos, near the Dnieper river, and to Cherson together with Bosporos, between which are the cities of the regions, then to the lake of Maeotis, which for its size is also called a sea, and to the city called Tamatarcha, and of Zichia...

Of Rhōsia, he says the following:

Patzinacia possesses all the land as far as Rhōsia and Bosporos and as far as Cherson and up to Sarat, Bourat and the rest of The Regions [τῶν Κλιμάτων, *Byzantine term for the Crimea*]... after Bosporos comes the mouth of the Maeotic Lake [*Sea of Azov*]... from the Maeotic Lake debouches a mouth called Bourlik and flows down into the Sea of Pontus where Bosporos is, and opposite to Bosporos is the city called Matracha; the width of the strait of this mouth is 18 miles... after Matracha, some 18 or 20 miles from it, is a river called Oukrouch, which divides Zichia and Matracha...¹²⁸

An important difference between *De Administrando* and *Kitab Rujar* is the inclusion of the town of “Bosporos”, which is not mentioned by Al-Idrisi in his text, nor included on his map. This is important because, although Rhōsia disappears from sources shortly after our time-period, Bosporos remains,

¹²⁸ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 182 ff; Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio Volume II – Commentary*. ed. R. J. H. Jenkins (London: Athlone Press, 1962), 13 & 155-56. Emphasis mine. Quote (especially chapter title) significantly abridged, though of course not with any change to the meaning of the text. The Greek phrase “Τα Κλιμάτα” (here τῶν Κλιμάτων), translated by Jenkins as “the Regions”, is often used to refer to the Crimean Peninsula, especially the south-eastern part. A linguistic parallel might be drawn with the English term ‘the Marches’, referring to the Anglo-Welsh border. It is not entirely clear which rivers are referred to by “Bourlik” or “Oukrouch”.

It is possible that the greek phrase τε Πωσίας καὶ Βοσπόρου is some form of hendyadis or tautology; however, the use of the particle-phrase τε... καὶ... (“both... and...”) makes such an interpretation seem quite unlikely to me. The *LSJ* gives no examples of such a use, but rather points out examples of where the τε... καὶ... construction is used to contrast, as much as conjoin, the respective phrases. See: <https://philolog.us/lsg/τε>. The context of the passage further undermines such a suggestion, as only a few lines earlier appeared the phrase “τε Δάναστρις καὶ ὁ Δάναπρις”, and the author is hardly using the τε... καὶ... construction to suggest that the Dniester and Dnieper are the same river.

surviving as a Genoese colony named Vosporo. Bosporos/Vosporo has maintained continuity until the present day, and thus can be unequivocally identified with Kerch.¹²⁹

With this in mind, the importance of *De Administrando* in our context becomes clear. Rhōsia and Bosporos are treated as separate entities, in separate locations. It is not “Rhōsia, which is also called Bosporos”, but instead the two towns are separate. If these two towns are separate, then Rhōsia cannot be Bosporos-Kerch. This would leave us with three, not two, separate towns: Rhōsia, Matracha, and Bosporos-Kerch.

The town of Bosporos was not insignificant during the middle Byzantine era. There is a record of a governor of Bosporos c.970, and at some stage it was also a bishopric. A travel-guide-cum-hagiography of the ninth century provides (perhaps slightly dubious) information about a great Church of the Holy Apostles there, containing a sarcophagus of “Simon the Apostle”.¹³⁰ Moreover, the town Bosporos had been around since the mid-sixth century, when it is mentioned both in a *periplus* (a written itinerary of a coastal voyage), and also Procopius’ *Wars*.¹³¹

The town of Bosporos is not mentioned in many sources, even those of travellers who visited its immediate region and in whose texts therefore we would expect to find mention of it. Such strange omissions are not uncommon in historical sources; however, it is quite curious how a source as well-informed as Al-Idrisi could have not simply mislocated, but wholly overlooked a whole town like this, given his comprehensive coverage of other regions. This becomes even more curious when it is noted that his text describes clockwise and anticlockwise routes around the Black Sea. In these routes, Rhōsia

¹²⁹ Shepard ‘Closer Encounters’, 20.

¹³⁰ Epiphanius the Monk, ‘Vita S. Andreae’, in *Patrologia Graeca* 120 (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1864), 216-60; Mango, ‘A Journey Round the Coast of the Black Sea in the Ninth Century’, 262-4.

¹³¹ ‘Periplus Ponti Euxini’, in Aubrey Diller, *The Tradition of the Minor Greek Geographers* (Lancaster, PA: American Philological Association, 1952), 113 ff; Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ed and Trans. H.B. Dewing (Harvard: Loeb Classical Library, 1914), 56-7 & 281. [Bk I. xii.7-8 and bk. II.iii.40]

is mentioned each time, separately, and apparently obliviously, to its other mention; however, on neither occasion is Bosphoros mentioned.¹³²

It is possible that Bosphoros is mentioned under another name; in this case, the most likely candidate would be “Botre”, a town “twenty miles from the mouth of the River Rhōsia”.¹³³ Applying the trigonometry here, with Botre being Bosphoros being Kerch, and Matracha being roughly Taman, as above, we would have the following distances : Kerch-Rhōsia, 20 miles. Kerch-Matracha, 11 miles. Matracha-Rhōsia, 26 miles. This would place the town of Rhōsia roughly where the modern town of Yakovenkove is. However, this is speculative only, and does not wholly convince. There is no additional evidence to support this identification beyond the rough triangulation in a bid to unify the evidence presented in several sources.¹³⁴

X Marks the Spot

Having examined all the evidence available, let us return to our original problem, that of the location of the places Rhōsia and Matracha, which were banned to the Genoese in the 1169 Chrysobull. We can say with some confidence that they were towns, and we can also say that the town of Matracha was located somewhere on the Straits of Kerch, likely the eastern coast.¹³⁵ As for Rhōsia, however, any precise placement of the town is more doubtful. If one favours Nystazopolou-Pelekidis’ proposal, Rhōsia is the town of Kerch. The ambiguity of the sources leaves such an identification in doubt, however. *De Administrando* is clear on Bosphoros-Kerch being a separate town from Rhōsia. Attempts to unify Al-Idrisi and *De Administrando* are speculative, but possible; however, without further evidence, our precision of identification is limited; we can only narrow down the location to the

¹³² For commentary on and explanation of this unusual error, see I. G. Konovalova, *Восточная Европа в Сочинении Ал-Идриси* [Eastern Europe in the Composition of al-Idrisi], (Vostochnya Literatura, 1999), 168-171; I. G. Konovalova, ‘Город Россия / Русийа в 12 в.’, 133-4.

¹³³ Al-Idrisi, *Opus Geographicum*, 909.

¹³⁴ The reader is referred to the map 2 in Appendix 1 on page 224.

¹³⁵ It must be noted that even this is thrown into slight doubt; William of Rubruck places “Matricia” on the Western (i.e. Crimean) side of the straits. However, the eastern side is the far-most-common attribution – Rubruck is surely in error.

approximate region. Thus the most accurate identification of Rhōsia, based on close analysis of the available sources, is that it was a town on the western coast of the Straits of Kerch, discrete from the separate town of Bosporos, but not far distant from it.

ii. Missed Connections: Contextualising the 1169 Chrysobull

Having established to what “Rhōsia and Matracha” referred, we can now turn towards the wider context of Byzantine foreign policy, in particular the stage of the Italian peninsula. The tangle of interests in the peninsula – not just those of its inhabitants, but also ambitious foreign powers – is seemingly complex to the uninitiated; therefore this section shall avoid (as far as is possible) a full recital of the minutiae of the struggles which enveloped Italy during this period, which are better recounted elsewhere¹³⁶; instead, we shall maintain a strict focus on those engagements which have a bearing on the economic and diplomatic status of the Black Sea, which is to say, engagements which affect the diplomatic relationship between Byzantium and the trading republics of Genoa and, to a lesser extent, Venice.

Dramatis Personae in 12th-Century Italy

There are five players with which we must concern ourselves: the *Compagna* of Genoa, the Republic of Venice, the Norman Kingdom of Southern Italy and Sicily (the *Regno*), the Holy Roman Empire (the *Reich*), and the Byzantine Empire.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ This section is indebted to D. N. Tolstoy-Miloslavsky ‘Manuel I Komnenos and Italy: Byzantine Foreign Policy, 1135-1180’ (Ph.D. Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2009), who gives an excellent analysis of Byzantine, Norman and German interests in the Italian peninsula during the 12th century. However, earlier authors who covered the same topic, and whose works are more widely available, are Werner Ohnsorge, *Das Zweikaiserproblem in früheren Mittelalter* (Hildesheim: August Lax, 1947); and Paolo Lamma, *Comneni e Staufer: Ricerche sui Rapporti fra Bisanzio e l’Occidente nel Secolo XII*, two vols. (Rome: Istituto storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1955). The diplomatic and economic relationship specifically between the northern republics and southern Regno can also be explored in David Abulafia, *The Two Italies: Economic Relations between the Norman Kingdom of Sicily and the Northern Communes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

¹³⁷ To avoid unnecessary confusion, ‘Empire’ will only be used to refer to Byzantium, and ‘Reich’ to refer to the Holy Roman Empire.

The first two actors, the maritime republics of Genoa and Venice were defined, largely, by their geography. Each was insulated from the main body of the Italian peninsula: Venice encircled by her serene lagoon, Genoa immured by the Apennine mountains. As a result, neither had any agricultural hinterland, or territory to speak of. Instead, their strength was drawn from the Mediterranean Sea, and the network of trade routes which crossed it. Here, their interests differed. Venice, situated as she was at the head of the Adriatic Sea, was primarily interested in Eastern trade – Constantinople, the Ionian and Aegean islands, and Alexandria were among her most common trade destinations.¹³⁸ Genoa, surveying the Tyrrhenian Sea, had previously been drawn westward; she wrestled with her eternal nemesis, Pisa, for control of Corsica and Sardinia, and her trading ships sailed to Sicily, the Iberian peninsula, Marseilles and southern France.¹³⁹ However, this easy division of the Mediterranean was one of many established orders disrupted by the Crusades. The Compagna, ever adventurous, established herself as a primary naval player in this new theatre, and was rewarded handsomely, gaining colonies in a variety of cities in the newly-established Crusader states, most notably Acre and Antioch.¹⁴⁰ This expansion eastward was not limited to Outremer; the Genoese soon extended tendrils into Constantinople, Alexandria, and other eastern cities.¹⁴¹ This incursion into Venice's commercial sphere of influence resulted in ever-increasing friction – now that Genoa was invested in the East, the twin republics were competing for the same markets. This would, inevitably,

¹³⁸ Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-5.

¹³⁹ Steven A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958-1528* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1, 14-16.

¹⁴⁰ The term 'colony' carries with it certain connotations, so it is best to clarify what colonies were in the context of Italian thassalocracies. For Venice and Genoa, especially during the early periods of their overseas activities as are discussed here, a colony was neither large nor often new; rather these were portions of already existing cities, in which a small area – a street or small district – was granted to the merchants of specific states in which they could be largely self-governing, enforce their own domestic laws, use their own weights and measures, and live as they would 'back home'. Though the details of the legal status of such colonies differed from one to the next, these were almost always accompanied by alleviations on commercial taxes, increasing the profit to be made by the Italian merchants. As a result, a community of permanent resident aliens tended to develop in these colonies, which could cause tension with local communities or rulers; however, during the period under consideration, Genoese and Venetian colonists made no attempt to impose their rule on those who already lived in the region; on the contrary, they were often, to some degree, subject to the local government. Thus distinction can be made between Italian medieval trading colonies, and later colonial imperialism.

¹⁴¹ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 74-5.

give birth to conflict between the two states, but for now (excluding minor localised scuffles), the war remained cold. Their battles were fought with *nervos belli*: gold rather than steel. However, these two maritime states, though ambitious and certainly not powerless, remained supporting players in the Italian drama; their naval strength made them valuable allies, but lack of terrestrial military power rendered them unable to dictate matters on the peninsula.

Events were instead driven by the three major powers, whose ambitions defined the conflicts of Italy. To the South was the Norman Regno, which ruled Southern Italy and Sicily, as well as a smattering of land around Tripoli in North Africa. The Normans had arrived at the turn of the millennium as mercenary-adventurers in the employ of local powers, but soon became rulers in their own right, establishing a collection of fiefdoms. The two most important of these were those of County of Sicily (conquered by 1091) and the Duchy of Apulia and Calabria in Southern Italy (a title which was established in 1059), which would be united on Christmas Day 1130 into the Kingdom of Sicily under Roger II. Recognition of his new royal title would be a diplomatic ambition for much of the King's reign.¹⁴² In contrast to the above-mentioned northern maritime republics, the Regno possessed sizeable forces on both land and sea. The ambition of her rulers brought her into conflict with a number of powers, most infamously the Papal States.

To the north of the peninsula was a resurgent Holy Roman Empire. The Reich viewed the expansionist Norman kingdom with a hostile eye, and sought to rebuff their conquests, and even conquer southern Italy herself; to this end, the Reich found a natural ally in Byzantium, which was equally apprehensive about the Regno's lust for enlargement. However, during the second half of the century, after Frederick I Barbarossa acceded to the throne, this alliance waned as German ambitions drifted from

¹⁴² Donald Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 33ff.

southern to northern Italy. This, in combination with wrangling over the right to the title of Christian Emperor, led Barbarossa and Byzantium to turn from friends to foes.¹⁴³

Finally, we have the Byzantine Empire, ruled by the Komnenian Dynasty, which watched from across the Adriatic Sea; it is this power which is our primary focus. Byzantine aspirations in Italy are a matter of dispute in the historiography. Traditionally, it has been held that the Komnenoi aspired to restore the Byzantine Empire in Italy, an adventurous but forlorn aspiration.¹⁴⁴ However, this position has been worn down under scrutiny; Byzantine military expeditions in Italy need not be construed as showing territorial ambition, but simply restraining the expansion of others – a good offence being the best defence.¹⁴⁵ For our concerns, this is largely an academic difference, as it had little impact on the axes of alliance with which this section is concerned. Whether the Komnenian emperors wished to restrain Norman and, later, German expansion, or desired to seize their Italian lands for themselves, Byzantium would still have found herself at odds with the same powers, engaged in the same wars, and threading the same diplomatic weave with minor players.

Finally, whilst not strictly an on-stage character, it would be remiss not to note the off-stage importance of the Papal States, alternately caught between, and puppeteering, the three major powers in Italy. The Papal relations with each of the three states were somewhat chequered. With regards to the Normans in the south, the Papacy did, somewhat successfully, during this period establish them as ‘defenders of St. Peter’, holding their lands by both Divine and Papal Grace; however, this was only established after the Norman imprisonment of firstly Leo IX in 1053, which resulted in the acknowledgement of the initial Norman conquests, and secondly Innocent II in 1139,

¹⁴³ Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, ‘Manuel I Komnenos and Italy’, 149ff.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, G. Ostrogorsky *History of the Byzantine State* (2nd edition), translated by J. M. Hussey (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), 384-6.

¹⁴⁵ See P. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143-1180* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 53-63, 87-8, or Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, ‘Manuel I Komnenos and Italy’, 111-123 *et passim*.

which resulted in the affirmation of Roger II as King of Sicily.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, relations with the Holy Roman Empire could also be strained. A dispute over religious versus temporal power, known as the Investiture Controversy, was only brought to a formal end in 1122 with the Concordat of Worms; meanwhile, the activities of popes to establish the patrimony of St. Peter as a state independent from the Holy Roman Emperor caused further friction upon this already-established fault line. As a result, the Papacy was continually concerned by the possibility of invasions both from the Reich in the north and the Regno in the south, and attempted to use them against each other.¹⁴⁷ Thirdly, relations with the Byzantine Emperor were equally complicated. The Great Schism had culminated in 1054 with mutual excommunications issued against the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople; whilst this schism never healed, it was not, as yet, seen as permanent or inevitable. Attempts to reunite the churches continued throughout this period, and the Byzantines were wooed by various popes as a counterbalance to both Norman and German threats.¹⁴⁸ Nor should we forget that, as described above, the calling of the First Crusade in 1095 was a trigger for the incursion of Genoese merchants into what had previously been Venetian economic spheres, amplifying tensions between the two maritime republics. As a result, although the Papacy's actions will not be described in detail in the following section, they cannot be ignored as a significant, if tacit, agent in this period of Italian history.

First Act: Norman-Byzantine Wars

With our players introduced, we can now throw ourselves into events. The main struggle of our drama, the Norman-Byzantine conflict, hardly needs explanation: Robert 'Guiscard', newly elevated by the Pope to Duke of Apulia and Calabria, having defeated what Byzantine garrisons that were in Italy and

¹⁴⁶ Brenda Bolton, 'Papal Italy', in *Italy in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. David Abulafia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 84; Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, 61-2.

¹⁴⁷ Bolton, 'Papal Italy', 82-9.

¹⁴⁸ Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, 'Manuel I Komnenos and Italy' 12-15 *et passim*.

subdued his lands, as a matter of course would look further afield for new territories to continue his ambitions. The Byzantine Balkans, a short jaunt across the Adriatic, were a natural target – Guiscard was already at war with Byzantium, and the wealth of the Balkans constituted a juicy prize. Moreover, having run out of lands and plunder in Italy, and the campaigns in Sicily having stalled, Guiscard was in need of new sources of wealth to keep his knights and soldiers in employ; especially, he needed lands for his son Bohemond.¹⁴⁹

Thus in 1081, seizing upon a pretender to the Byzantine throne, purporting to be the recently-deposed Emperor Michael VIII Doukas, as a justification, Guiscard set upon on the Byzantine Balkans.¹⁵⁰ The bridgehead of this campaign would be the fortress of Durazzo, supported by the seizure of Corfu, which granted control of the surrounding waters as well as providing a useful base of operations close to the besieged fortress.¹⁵¹ Both sides recognised the key strategic importance of Durazzo, as it controlled the *Via Egnatia*, which led through the heart of the Balkans all the way to Constantinople itself. As a result, control the fortress was heavily contested, with the Normans attacking it repeatedly in 1081, 1107, 1147 and 1185.¹⁵²

Control of Corfu and of the coastal fortress of Durazzo required a naval force. For the Normans, this was not an impediment; they possessed, according to Anna Komnene, “a strong fleet composed of every kind of vessel with a different set of soldiers, highly experienced in naval warfare... fitted out with every species of military instruments”. This fleet has been confirmed to have been deployed during the Norman campaigns in 1082, 1147, and 1185, capturing Corfu on all three occasions.¹⁵³ For

¹⁴⁹ For discussion on Guiscard’s motivations for campaigning in the Balkans, see R. Upsher Smith Jr, ‘“Noblissimus” and Warleader: The opportunity and the necessity behind Robert Guiscard’s Balkan expeditions’, *Byzantion* 70.2 (2000), 507-526; and Georgios Theotokis, *The Norman Campaigns in the Balkans, 1081-1108* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 137-143.

¹⁵⁰ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 57-61

¹⁵¹ Durazzo, also known as Dyrrachium, is the modern city of Durrës in Albania.

¹⁵² Sieges of Durazzo constitute a large part of the *Alexiad*, discussed particularly prominently in books IV-VI and XII-XIII See Komnene, *Alexiad*, ed. Beck, 120-202 & 359-423; Dawes, *The Alexiad*, 120ff; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 57-61, 91-2, 95, 109-11.

¹⁵³ Komnene, *Alexiad*, ed Beck, 120-123; Dawes, *The Alexiad*, 117-8; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 57, 86, 109.

Byzantium, however, the deployment of a maritime contingent was a greater problem; they had only a limited naval force. As a result, they relied on their old alliance with Venice. Venetian naval prowess was renowned. Although the Norman fleet outnumbered that of Venice, the Republic could outmatch it in naval skill, rendering the two forces roughly evenly matched; in practice, the Venetians often had the upper hand.¹⁵⁴ Byzantium could thus engage the Normans on land, and the Venetians at sea; in concert, they could together frustrate the ambitions of the Regno.¹⁵⁵

Venetian assistance was thus essential for Byzantium.¹⁵⁶ However, Venice was well aware of the principle that if one is good at something, it should never be done for free. They expected, and received, rewards for their naval assistance. This is the background to the 1082 chrysobull issued by Alexios I Komnenos.¹⁵⁷ The generosity of this bull cannot be overstated. Venice was granted a wealth of privileges: an *embolum* (trade quarter) in Constantinople; gifts to the Bishop and Church of St. Mark; an annual stipend for the Doge along with the grand-sounding title of *Protosebastos*; and, most importantly, the right to trade throughout the empire completely free of the ten-percent *Kommerkion* sales tax.¹⁵⁸ This latter grant would come to haunt Byzantium, and overshadow Byzantine-Venetian

¹⁵⁴ Sandra Origone, *Bisanzio e Genova* (Genova: Edizioni culturali internazionali, 1992), 42

¹⁵⁵ A fascinating line from Anna Komnene states that Venetian assistance was not the only, or even the first, solution Alexios proposed to the Norman problem: "Consequently Alexios was afraid and considering the magnitude of the task before him and realizing that the forces at his command were only equal to a small fraction of Robert's, he deemed it necessary to call upon the Turks in the East for help, and signified his desire to the Sultan." Turks are later numbered among Alexios' forces near Thessalonica.

Komnene, *Alexiad.* 120-4; Dawes, *The Alexiad*, 100 & 103; Thomas F. Madden, 'The Chrysobull of Alexios I Komnenos to the Venetians: the Date and the Debate', *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002), 29.

¹⁵⁶ Lamma, *Comneni e Stauffer*, vol 2, 185-6.

¹⁵⁷ There has been much debate over the exact dating of this chrysobull, as the dates on the surviving manuscripts are clearly wrong, likely due to scribal error in the copying and translation of the original bull. Scholarly consensus is on 1082, and contextual evidence suggests certainly before 1084. The bull was issued due to Venetian assistance against the Normans – either in voluntary and grateful thanks, or begrudgingly in response to demands. For a historical and historiographical analysis, see Thomas F. Madden, 'The Chrysobull of Alexios I Komnenos to the Venetians', 23-41.

¹⁵⁸ Although some historians dispute whether or not the entire empire was open to Venetians, the bull is clear: the Venetians are granted freedom to trade in a list of specified locations, which is then followed by the phrase: "in short, everywhere under my control". This reading is supported by contextual evidence of the Venetians trading in locations not specified in the bull. See David Jacoby, 'Italian privileges and Trade in Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade: A Reconsideration', *Anuario de estudios mediavales* 24 (1994), 364, and David Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers and the Black Sea before 1204', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100.2 (2007), 683-685. This will be discussed in more detail below, starting on page 98.

relations, for the next 120 years. Whether this was given “freely and of their own free will”, or begrudgingly in response to Venetian demands, is a matter of interpretation. Certainly the introduction to the bull is amicable enough, for “of the loyalty of the Venetians, not a soul is ignorant”.¹⁵⁹ However, viewed with a cynical perspective, this can be seen as overblown diplomatic flattery rather than genuine gratitude. However, this nuance is unimportant for our purposes; it is enough to know that the bull was granted.

The virtue of Venetian friendship may or may not have been dubious in 1082; however, in 1148-9, there was no doubt about its mercenary nature. While assisting Byzantium at the siege of Corfu, which had been captured by Roger II of Sicily, the Venetians and Greeks fell to brawling with one another. This escalated to more than just a petty squabble: it culminated in the Venetians burning some Greek ships and – worse – stealing the ship of the Emperor himself, upon which they held a derisory coronation, hailing an Ethiopian as “Emperor of the Romans”, and mocking Manuel for not having “summer-yellow” hair.¹⁶⁰ This combination of attacks on both the subjects and the personality of the Emperor no doubt stung the imperial ego, yet the Venetians seem to go entirely unpunished; in Choniates’ account, the Emperor promptly offered the Venetians amnesty. Certainly there were practical concerns – the Emperor could not afford to lose their naval support mid-siege; however, Choniates would have us believe that the emperor nursed a grudge for over two decades before punishing the Venetians by having all Venetians citizens in the empire arrested. The chronicler’s association between the events of 1148-9 and those of 1171 is certainly tenuous, but if there was any other Byzantine retaliation, it must have gone unrecorded. Such a delay between crime and punishment would suggest to the Venetians that they could act with impunity to the detriment of the Empire. Upon such foundations no alliance could stand. Even if Manuel could not (or would not) punish the Venetians directly, it was necessary to deprive them of their indispensability. This would

¹⁵⁹ “Ea, que fidelium Veneticorum sunt, nullus omnium ignoravit”. *T&T*, vol. 1, 51. Translation mine.

¹⁶⁰ Choniates, *Historiae*, 86. The curious insult is rendered in the Greek as “μὴ ξανθίζοντα τὴν κόμην ὡς θέρος.”

not only allow the Empire to end their reliance on the Venetians, but might also encourage the Venetians to change their stance of arrogant disregard to the Empire.

Second Act: The 1155 Summit(s)

It is this that was the motivation for the 1155 negotiations between Genoa and Byzantium. The Byzantine ambassador, Demetrius Makrembolites, “happened” to be in Genoa, according to Epstein – a curious suggestion.¹⁶¹ It is rare that individuals invested with authority to negotiate on behalf of the Byzantine Emperor “happen” to be anywhere, and certainly do not “happen” to negotiate. Rather, Makrembolites was a man on a diplomatic mission: to draw the Genoese into the Byzantine fold.¹⁶² If successful, this would fulfil the twin aims of providing assistance against the Normans, and quelling Venetian impudence. However, Makrembolites failed on two counts: the agreement he negotiated only extended as far as guaranteeing Genoese neutrality, and moreover, this agreement (drafts of which survive) was apparently never enacted.¹⁶³

There is nothing especially exciting or controversial in the Makrembolites agreement; it is rather limited in its aims, when compared to other treaties between Byzantium and Italian merchant-states. The main thrust of the document is that the Genoese would not assist any enemy of the Empire against Byzantium (a clause presumably aimed at the Norman Regno), and any Genoese in Constantinople during an attack would assist the Imperial navy with their service.¹⁶⁴ In exchange, the Genoese were given various gifts (the customary pallia and stipends for their bishop, among others), and the same trade privileges as Pisa (who had received their grant in 1111): namely, an *embolum* in Constantinople,

¹⁶¹ Makrembolites is sometimes called Makropolites, as by Epstein. I have adopted the variation as used in the Greek of Kinnamos. John Kinnamos, *Historiarum*, ed. Augustus Meineke (Bonn: *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, 1836) 67; John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, trans. Charles M. Brand (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1976), 58; Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, 72.

¹⁶² Gerald W. Day, *Genoa's Response to Byzantium* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 23.

¹⁶³ Origone, *Bisanzio e Genova*, 51; Balard, *La Romanie Génoise*, 23-28.

¹⁶⁴ Exception is made regarding the disputed territory of Antioch, which was claimed both by the Crusaders and the Empire; Genoa, tied to the crusaders by virtue of her trading quarters there, had her hands bound in this matter.

and a decreased rate of *Kommerkion* (from 10% down to 4%).¹⁶⁵ Due to its relatively milquetoast nature, therefore, the non-application of this treaty is confusing. The surviving copy of the agreement is unratified, and there is no record of its ratification by the Compagna. The later 1169 Chrysobull makes no reference to previous treaties, or previous practices, except with regards to the Pisans.¹⁶⁶ Caffaro records that in 1155 Genoa “concluded peace” with the Byzantium, but given that there had been no war, the account is already muddled from the outset. The details which he gives of the agreement are accurate, but incomplete. He records only privileges– the *embolum* and a tax break “of between four and ten percent” – with no corresponding responsibilities on the Genoese part. Moreover, he records the later mission of Amico di Murta to Constantinople, in order to “demand the slipways and *embolum* which had been promised”.¹⁶⁷ This account suggests that the Genoese believed they had ‘done their part’ of the agreement, and that it was Byzantium who was holding out for some reason.

However, this matter is further confused by an appendix to the 1155 agreement, in the form of some instructions issued to Amico di Murta regarding an embassy to Constantinople. Unhelpfully, they are undated, and furthermore are only attached to some, but not all, surviving copies of the 1155 agreement.¹⁶⁸ Thus their relationship to the agreement is uncertain; given di Murta’s ubiquity in Genoese-Byzantine negotiations, they could feasibly apply to any embassy from 1155 up to the 1169 chrysobull. These instructions contain demands for a notable extension to Genoese privileges in Constantinople. The 1155 agreement is explicit in its hierarchy of Italian powers – the Genoese are to get the same tax breaks, protections and rights, and a quarter, “just as the Pisans have”.¹⁶⁹ However, di Murta’s instructions are more ambitious: he is to demand the right to trade throughout the Empire,

¹⁶⁵ *Nuova Serie* 343; *LI* 1.1 262-264.

¹⁶⁶ Caffaro of Genoa, *Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth-Century Crusades*, ed. and trans. Martin Hall and Jonathan Phillips (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 75.

¹⁶⁷ Caffaro, *Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth-Century Crusades*, 80; Lamma, *Comneni e Staufer*, vol 2, 184-5.

¹⁶⁸ There are no instructions attached to the copy found in *LI*, 1.1, 262.

¹⁶⁹ *Nuova Serie*, 343.

including Matracha (the first reference to this location in negotiations), “just as the Venetians were doing”, and demand status in the empire “just as the Venetians have, or at least not worse than the Pisans have”.¹⁷⁰

These instructions represented a significant advance on the 1155 agreement: a larger quarter, greater trading rights, and a further four-percentage-point tax break (up to a total of a ten percent, which was a total waive of the *Kommerkion*). Particularly interesting is the inclusion of a request for an *embolum*, implying that the Genoese did not at that point have possession of one. This fits neatly with the mission of di Murta to Constantinople as mentioned in Caffaro, suggesting these instructions may well have been issued in the immediate aftermath of the 1155 agreement. If so, then it is clear that the 1155 agreement was not regarded as concluded, at least from the Genoese perspective – they wished to increase their profit on the deal. If Makrembolites had returned to Constantinople celebrating a done deal, then the later arrival of a negotiator would have surely caused some umbrage in the imperial court.

This umbrage would have been compounded by the further revelation of a Genoese treaty with the *Regno*, which was negotiated in 1156 and ratified by the Compagna the following year.¹⁷¹ Here, a clear difference was seen between the Venetians and the Genoese, and particularly their strategic interests. If the Byzantine-Norman wars concluded with victory – partial or complete – for the Normans, the *Regno* would control both the ‘heel’ of Italy and the fortress of Durazzo, forming a noose round the entrance to the Adriatic Sea; as a result, they would be able to throttle the maritime trade there on a whim. This trade was the very oxygen of the Republic of Venice; this threat of economic strangulation was thus both real and deathly. For the Republic, therefore, involvement in the war was a strategic necessity; she had to ensure that each coast of the straits of the Adriatic remained in separate hands. For Genoa, however, there was no such existential threat. The possibility of a garrotte about the throat

¹⁷⁰ *Nuova Serie*, 348.

¹⁷¹ Origone, *Bisanzio e Genova*, 42; Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, 72-4.

of the Adriatic was of little consequence to the Compagna; for her ships swelled the Tyrrhenian and Ligurian seas, which were much harder for a malignant power to encircle. Thus, unlike Venice, Genoa did not have such a vested interest in the outcome of the war; let them fight as they wished, as long they left the Compagna be, to trade as she willed.

This is not to say that the Normans posed no threat to the Genoese; indeed, they already had a similar economic noose to the west of Italy. The *Regno* controlled both sides of the Straits of Messina, between the toe of Italy and Sicily, passage of which was almost essential for voyages from the Tyrrhennian Sea eastward, to either Constantinople or the Levant. Moreover, Norman control of Malta, and temporary conquest in the 1140s of towns such as Mahdia, Susa and Tripoli demonstrated that even attempting to take the 'long way' round Sicily would not allow Genoese merchants to avoid Norman control. With this in mind, it may seem logical for the Genoese to support Byzantine expansion in Italy, with the aim of dividing control of the Straits between the Empire and the *Regno* – which would have had the added bonus of restricting the growth of Genoa's Adriatic rival.

We must first dismiss the notion that such an outcome (i.e. Byzantine control of southern Italy) was impossible. It is necessary to shed the prejudice of hindsight – whilst the Byzantine campaign in Italy did not result in substantial territorial gains for the Empire, that does not mean that it could not have done, nor that the Genoese would have known that it could not have done. Indeed, several contemporary sources suggest such a possibility: Kinnamos states that the alliance between the Holy Roman Empire and Byzantium was done with the aim of acquiring Italy for Byzantium, and that Manuel wrote to William I stating that "the Romans will not abstain from warring in Italy until they place it and the whole island under our power"; so too writes Boso, in his life of Pope Hadrian IV, where he has the Papacy in negotiations with Byzantium for expelling William not just from the Italian peninsula, but the island Sicily as well.¹⁷² Whether or not the complete reconquest of Italy was truly Manuel's

¹⁷² Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, 'Manuel I Komnenos and Italy', 109 & 111-2

aim, Byzantine expansion in Italy must surely have nonetheless seemed a real, if more distant possibility during the Norman-Byzantine wars, and should we suppose that the Venetians could attempt to exploit this conflict to their advantage, there is no reason to assume that the Genoese were not equally capable.

In part, this difference in approach can be explained geographically. The Strait of Messina is, at its narrowest, only 3 miles wide. Thus, even assuming that the two sides of the strait could be stably held by opposing powers (not a foregone conclusion by any means), should the Genoese incur the enmity of either one, peaceful passage of the straits could easily become impossible. By contrast, the Adriatic Sea is much wider; at its mouth, the Strait of Otranto stretches for 45 miles, allowing for easy passage of ships avoiding the polities on one side or the other; by contrast. Thus it can easily be argued that the geopolitical situations of Venice and Genoa, with regard to the Norman-Byzantine wars, were not truly parallel.

It could also be noted that, given the possibility of German support in any economic conflict between Genoa and Sicily, and given the significant harm which a hostile Genoese fleet could cause, both through piracy at sea, and through raids against inhabitants on the substantial coastline of the Norman Kingdom, that the Genoese posed a sufficient threat to the *Regno* as to not unreasonably fear the closure of the straits of Messina, should the Normans ever consider that possibility.¹⁷³ However, there is no reason to assume such a hostile standoff as the basis of Sicilian-Genoese diplomacy. On the contrary, the Genoese appear to have possessed considerable affinity with the *Regno*. As noted above, Sicily was one of the natural destinations for any merchant ship leaving the harbour of Genoa; whilst Venetian merchants are recorded in Sicily, given that it lay some small distance outside the Adriatic,

¹⁷³ Abulafia compares the damage done by Pisan piracy in the 1160-70s; however, one could also cite the Venetian trade war against Byzantium from 1124-6, whereby Venetian raids in the Ionian sea forced the emperor John Komnenos to reinstate the Venetian trading privileges which he had only recently revoked. Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, 98; Serban Marin, 'A Precedent to the Fourth Crusade. The anti-Byzantine Campaign of Doge Domenico Michiel in 1122-26 according to the Venetian Chronicles', *Annuario* 6-7 (2005), 239-266.

the island was not as essential to Venetian trade as to Ligurian.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, Sicily became one of the main suppliers of grain to Genoa during this period, which, given the city's lack of substantial agricultural hinterland, was an essential import.¹⁷⁵ It is thus only natural that ties would have formed between Genoa and Sicily's rulers; and this friendly relationship became more substantial during the course of the First Crusade, when Bohemond of Taranto had granted considerable privileges to the Genoese in his newly-captured domain of Antioch, in gratitude for their maritime assistance.¹⁷⁶ Closer to home, Genoese merchants had a permanent base on the island of Sicily, in Messina, since at least 1116.¹⁷⁷ Thus there already existed, prior to the diplomacy surrounding the Norman-Byzantine conflict, substantial economic links between Genoa and Sicily.

Abulafia has made some keen observations on the importance of these links. Firstly, he notes that the Genoese on two occasions (1162 and 1191) obtained in the Holy Roman Empire less favourable trading conditions than those granted to Pisa; this he attributes to the fact that the Pisans were willing to aid German attacks against the Norman Kingdom, as they had for example in 1130, but that the Genoese were "reluctant to abandon their profitable arrangements [which] cost them the fullest favours" of the Kaiser – a clear display of the value (both economic and diplomatic) which they put on their Sicilian trading links.¹⁷⁸ Building on this evidence of close ties, Abulafia posits an interesting interpretation of an expedition of 1160 destined to Byzantium, carrying Genoese legates. Despite the ongoing attempts to obtain the promised *embolum* in Constantinople, which could offer considerable value to the *Compagna*, there are nonetheless contractual provisions "should [the legates] agree to remain with the King of Sicily". Abulafia speculates that this clause is indicative of an attempt "to sound out opinion in Sicily on their negotiations with the Greek emperor" in light of the 1157 Genoese-Norman treaty

¹⁷⁴ David Abulafia, 'Pisan Commercial Colonies and Consulates in Twelfth-Century Sicily', *English Historical Review* 93 (1978), 71.

¹⁷⁵ Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, 273-5.

¹⁷⁶ Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, 29.

¹⁷⁷ Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, 92

¹⁷⁸ Abulafia, 'Pisan Commercial Colonies', 72-3.

which guaranteed no Genoan would fight for Byzantium against Sicily. Although by 1160 Byzantium and the *Regno* were no longer at war, “the Genoese were aware that William still had fears [which] must be placated even if this meant that the [diplomatic] expedition proceeded no further on its way to Manuel than the court of Sicily... the *Regno* was an asset that could not be squandered lightly.”¹⁷⁹ Thus even though the Genoese insisted on neutrality in their treaties with both the Normans and Byzantines, they were not, perhaps, without their favoured side in the trans-Adriatic conflict.

The Genoese-Norman friendship had reached a particularly high point by 1156; the new King of Sicily, William I, confirmed the privileges that had been enjoyed in practice by the Genoese under his father Roger, approved numerous tax breaks for their merchants, and also ensured that they were the main trade link between Sicily and Provence. In return for these privileges, the Genoese swore a non-aggression pact, assuring the *Regno* that they had nothing to fear from the Genoese fleet. This was confirmed by an oath sworn by the consuls and 300 men of Genoa in 1157.¹⁸⁰ The Normans, possessing a sizeable fleet of their own, had no need of Genoese ships themselves; it was enough to know that the *Compagna*’s fleet would not be deployed against them.

Thus, the Genoese assertion of neutrality in their 1157 pact with the Normans no doubt came as a substantial blow to Byzantine diplomatic ambitions; not only did they find that their attempt to woo the Genoese had come up short, and now Di Murta had arrived on their doorstep with a list of demands, but throughout the whole endeavour it seemed the Genoese had been negotiating in bad faith. The Genoese probably did not see it this way, as there should be little conflict between their non-aggression pacts with the *Regno* and Byzantium; but in Manuel’s eyes, his hope to deploy the Genoese against the Normans had been suddenly and wholly dashed.¹⁸¹ The plan for Genoa to act as

¹⁷⁹ Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, 115-6.

¹⁸⁰ Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, 76; Day, *Genoa’s Response to Byzantium*, 23; Origone, *Bisanzio e Genova*, 42.

¹⁸¹ Lamma offers a particularly charitable view of Genoese diplomacy during this period, arguing that their dealings with the Byzantines and Sicilians were done in isolation from each other, and that the ramifications of such double dealings were unforeseen by the *Compagna*. This argument is based upon an uncynical reading of

a substitute Venice had collapsed. It is thus little wonder that Genoese-Byzantine negotiations stalled, and there would be no agreement, draft or otherwise, until 1169.¹⁸²

The Third Act Twist: the Outbreak of Peace and the Zweikaiserproblem.

A factor that casts doubt on this interpretation of Genoese-Byzantine and Venetian-Byzantine diplomacy would be the peace treaty concluded between Manuel and the Regno in 1158. Manuel had taken the war to Italy, gained some substantial successes, capturing or bribing a number of Norman fortresses, but been rebuffed after Norman counterstrikes at Brindisi and Bari. However, having proved the strength of the Byzantine military, and dispelled the notion that the Balkans were an easy prize, Manuel was happy to secure peace with the Normans on the grounds of a return to the *status ante quo*. Thus, whilst it may have had a bearing on the failed 1155 Makrembolites agreement, viewing the Genoese-Byzantine chrysobull of 1169 (with its Rhōsia and Matracha clause) in the light of the now-concluded Byzantine-Norman war would be anachronistic.

There are, however, two problems with this criticism. Firstly, the signing of a peace treaty, though it ended the war, did not end the Byzantine-Norman conflict, and certainly did not mean Manuel now looked at the Regno as a friend or even a neutral party in Byzantine foreign policy; such an interpretation is superficial. The peace simply meant an end to current military engagements; it did not mean that Byzantium and the Normans were no longer at odds with each other, as neither the Norman hunger for expansionism, nor Byzantine thirst for revenge, had been sated. Secondly, the ceasing of hostilities with Normans did not mean that all was quiet on Byzantium's western front, but rather that the status of 'most pressing threat' had migrated to another power – the Holy Roman Empire.

Caffaro. For my part, I have a hard time believing that the Genoese would have been quite so naïve to the results of their diplomacy, but Lamma's argument is a valid one. Lamma, *Comneni e Staufer*, vol 1, 231-6.

¹⁸² Balard, *La Romanie Génoise*, Vol 1, 28.

Although the Reich and the Empire had previously been allies against Norman expansionism, with coordinated campaigns attempted multiple times, by 1160 relations had soured considerably.¹⁸³ The Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick I Barbarossa, wished to subjugate Lombardy to his rule, a policy which was announced at the Second Diet of Roncaglia in northern Italy in 1158. This policy would cause some discomfort to Manuel for two reasons. Firstly, whether Manuel had territorial ambitions in Italy himself, or simply wished to maintain the balance of power in the region, he would object to a strong German military presence in Italy, which would frustrate both of those aims. In addition, an expansionist Barbarossa, having subjugated Italy, might turn his eyes to Byzantine lands, as had the Normans before him. Another factor leading to the cooling of relations between the Reich and Byzantium was the issue of 'imperial' authority; that is to say, who had the right to call themselves the 'Emperor of Christendom'. Both Manuel and Frederick had pretensions to such a title, and competition over the claim caused some friction between the two self-styled Emperors. The German term for this complicated diplomatic impasse is wonderfully succinct: the *Zweikaiserproblem*.¹⁸⁴

The two powers never came directly to blows, but the chill in relations was real. Diplomatic alignments took shape. Venice, despite her proximity to this new 'Cold War', maintained a careful non-involvement. She had no 'skin in the game' – having no land for Frederick to invade and no ties to the Reich, and apparently not viewing an invasion of Byzantium as a real possibility with which she could concern herself, she paid little heed to Byzantium's worries. Any possibility of Venetian assistance or alliance was destroyed in 1171, when Manuel, for reasons which remain unclear, ordered the arrest of all Venetians in his empire, igniting a small but fast-burning war with the Republic. In any case, the

¹⁸³ This date may even be too late; some historians place the break as early as the accession of Frederick I in 1152. See Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, 'Manuel I Komnenos and Italy', 141-2.

¹⁸⁴ Literally: 'The Two-Emperor-Problem'. Relationships between Byzantium and the West through this lens was first thoroughly discussed in Werner Ohnsorge, *Das Zweikaiserproblem in früheren Mittelalter* (Hildesheim: August Lax, 1947), especially 80-97. See also Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, 'Manuel I Komnenos and Italy', 143-148.

defeat of Frederick by the Lombard league at Legnano five years later put a stop to imperial ambitions in Italy for the time being.¹⁸⁵

Genoa, however, had no such possibility of neutrality, as she was, nominally, under the rule of the Reich. This state of affairs could prove beneficial to Genoa. For example, a Genoese embassy to Frederick on his accession requested that he confirm their right to trade toll-free throughout the Reich, as they were, after all, imperial subjects – a lucrative opportunity, and doubly welcome for a merchant-republic like the Compagna.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, a Genoese representation at the diet of Roncaglia argued that they owed Frederick no money, soldiers, or hostages; they only owed him loyalty, as they served the Reich by defending the coasts from barbarian attack – Frederick could not do so without their help “even with an outlay of 10,000 silver marks a year”. Surprisingly, this argument appears to have been accepted, although the Genoese did make Frederick a “gift” of 1,200 marks.¹⁸⁷ Both of these examples show that the Genoese and Frederick both knew that the Compagna owed some level of allegiance to the Reich. She may be allowed to enjoy a degree of independence in practice, but this enjoyment could be halted at Frederick’s whim, should he wish to seize control of the Compagna. The Genoese would therefore look upon Frederick’s repeated transalpine campaigns with considerable foreboding. It is no coincidence that Caffaro’s annals move from the Genoese persuading Frederick to allow their continued independence, directly to the building of great new walls for the Compagna. Time and again Caffaro reports on the fear and trembling of the towns of Lombardy before Frederick’s might, notably after the siege and capture of the once-independent city of Milan, less than 100 miles away from the Compagna, and of Tortona in Piedmont, less than 50 miles away.¹⁸⁸ Frederick’s armies were a threat the Compagna took seriously.

¹⁸⁵ Choniates, *Historiae*, 172-174. As noted above, it may have been a belated revenge for the indignities at Corfu in 1148-9, but difficult to say if this were really the case.

¹⁸⁶ Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, 114; Caffaro, *Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth-Century Crusades*, 75-6.

¹⁸⁷ Caffaro, *Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth-Century Crusades*, 81-2.

¹⁸⁸ Caffaro, *Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth-Century Crusades*, 75-6, 81-2.

So too did Byzantium. For Manuel, worrying over a potential invasion of his Empire, the possibility of Frederick annexing Genoa would have been a further cause for concern. While the Normans had been (and would in the future continue to be) a naval power in their own right, the Reich was not. Frederick's strength was entirely 'land-locked'. A land-based invasion of Byzantium from Cologne was not a real possibility – Frederick would have had to travel through a great deal of foreign territory with a sizeable army. Such an expedition was complicated and risky enough when travelling under a papal banner in the name of Christendom for the Third Crusade, but to do so simply for personal ambition (however Frederick chose to dress it up) was nigh impossible. Thus any invasion of Byzantium needed to have naval support, and so Frederick would need to contract or seize for himself a fleet. Genoa would be the logical place for him to do so – whether he obtained their fleet through gold, or force of arms. Manuel, therefore, was justifiably concerned about a possible alignment of the Reich and the Compagna.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, Lamma argues that the primary aim of Manuel's overtures to the Italian merchant republics was in order to be able to use them against the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁹⁰

It is against this background that 'peace broke out' between the Regno and Byzantium. The war had ended, somewhat inconclusively, but the resulting "peace was not sealed by mutual trust"¹⁹¹. In the long term, the tension between Byzantium and the Kingdom of Sicily remained unresolved, and neither side was under this peace had provided any such resolution. Rather, this was a truce between the two parties, each of whom had – for the present – more pressing concerns to deal with. William of Sicily was rapidly losing his African dominions and facing brewing discontent among his nobles, and his war with Byzantium was providing little speedy success, and little hope of any in the near future.¹⁹² For his part, Manuel had troubles in the east and the rising ambitions of Frederick in the north with which he need to concern himself. That this peace was signed in 1158, the same year as Frederick's public

¹⁸⁹ Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, 'Manuel I Komnenos and Italy', 149-161.

¹⁹⁰ Lamma, *Comneni e Staufer*, vol 2, 185-6.

¹⁹¹ Abulafia, *The Two Italies*, 116.

¹⁹² Matthew, *The Norman Kingdom of Sicily*, 58-9.

declaration of his ambitions in Lombardy, is no coincidence. Moreover, according to one source, it even had a temporal clause written into it – that the peace was to last 30 years, after which the two parties could resume hostilities without any additional damage to their honour.¹⁹³ To the credit of both sides, it did almost last that long – it was not until 1185, 27 years later, that Byzantium and the Regno would find themselves at war again, when, as if to make up for lost time, the Normans would violently sack and pillage Thessalonica.¹⁹⁴

Epilogue: The Cost of Caution

Thus even after the surprisingly quick *volte-face* of Byzantine policy in Italy in the late 1150s, Genoa was still no more closely aligned with Byzantium than it was before. Her refusal to pick a side in either of Byzantium's conflicts with the Regno or with the Reich, whilst it may have safeguarded her independence and avoided risk of destruction, cost the Compagna a great deal with regards to her reputation in Byzantium's eyes. Her links with Sicily, innocently mercantile though they may have been, remained incriminating in the view of the Byzantine court, while the rise of Frederick's increasingly threatening Reich further damaged the reliability of Genoa in Byzantium's perspective. It was possible for Byzantium to gain an assurance of neutrality, something they almost achieved in 1155, and succeeded in achieving in 1169; however, they would not have relied upon Genoa to keep to this agreement. Even if her steadfastness could be believed, the possibility of Frederick simply annexing the city meant that it was not just Genoese friendship which was necessary. By fault of geography as much as of the Genoese, Byzantium was simply unable to trust the Compagna. Any treaties made would have to bear in mind the real possibility that anything given to Genoa would end up in the hands of Byzantium's enemies, whether by state action, individual treachery, or simply

¹⁹³ Tolstoy-Miloslavsky, 'Manuel I Komnenos and Italy', 124.

¹⁹⁴ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 118; Charles M. Brand, *Byzantium Confronts The West 1180-1204* (Harvard, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 162-167.

annexation of the Compagna by the Reich. In short, whilst alliance with Genoa might be desirable for the Empire, it could never be allowed to become an alliance upon which Byzantium depended.

iii. *Loose Lips Sink Ships*: The Importance of Matracha to Imperial Diplomacy

We now know the context in which the Rhōsia and Matracha clause was written and enforced; we can therefore now examine the clause in this context, and see the significance of the prohibition of Genoese merchants from trading in these towns.

*The Diplomatic and Historiographical Context of the Clause*¹⁹⁵

Although this ‘Rhōsia and Matracha’ clause of the chrysobull may seem a small and unimportant detail of the treaty, the diplomatic wrangling over it suggests that it was of some import to both the Genoese and the Byzantines. The clause appears on at least three separate occasions: an 1155 draft agreement, an 1169 chrysobull by Manuel I Komnenos, and an 1192 renewal of that same chrysobull by Isaac II Angelos.

We have already discussed the circumstances of the 1155 agreement, and its lack of ratification. It is noteworthy that the agreement itself includes no Rhōsia and Matracha clause, or indeed any clause regarding trading destinations. Compared to (say) the Venetian-Byzantine agreement, there is a notable omission of specified trade destinations. It would be easy to assume that a lack of either prohibitions or specified destinations would imply Genoese would be able to trade throughout the empire, but the fact that this is not stated is unusual. Moreover, when examining the instructions to Amico di Murta, appended to the 1155 agreement, the contrary seems to be the case:

You will also remember carefully on behalf of this latest and greatest assembly to request, in all the land of the Empire itself, which it has or will have... that they

¹⁹⁵ For the extant versions of the text of the Rhōsia and Matracha clause, see Appendix 2 on page 231.

might have the unrestricted and suitable opportunity of trading and free consumption in all lands and all parts of the empire.... And [the opportunity] of going to Matracha and that they might enjoy all the same privileges and concessions [*indulctis*] just as the Venetians were doing.¹⁹⁶

This is the first mention of either Rhōsia or Matracha in Genoese-Byzantine correspondence, and it is intriguing that Matracha alone, and not Rhōsia, is mentioned here (Rhōsia would first be named in the 1169 chrysobull). That these instructions were given to di Murta implies some restriction on Genoese trade in Byzantium previously existed, a restriction likely including Matracha.

As discussed above, precise dating of these instructions is difficult, but it seems likely that they correspond to the 1156 mission mentioned in Caffaro.¹⁹⁷ Regardless of their precise dating, two points can be deduced from these instructions. Firstly, the instructions imply that the journeying to Matracha was one of the ‘privileges and concessions which the Venetians were enjoying’. This suggests that the Venetians had been granted right of trade in Matracha, or, at the very least, the Genoese were under the impression that they had. Secondly, there is the intriguing implication that it is the Genoese who began the struggle over trade rights in Matracha, suggesting a definite Genoese interest in gaining the right to trade in Matracha. The reason for this interest is not explicitly stated.

This was an interest which the Emperor Manuel would frustrate in 1169, if he had not already done so. The chrysobull he issued in 1169 is, as it were, the ‘definitive’ version of the Rhōsia and Matracha clause, formalised and clearly stated, among a clear statement of other Genoese rights, privileges and (military) responsibilities. This version of the clause is repeated verbatim in the 1198 chrysobull.¹⁹⁸

Comparably, these versions of the Clause are simple: the Genoese may trade anywhere in the Empire,

¹⁹⁶ *Nuova Serie*, 348. Translation mine. The original text can be found in Appendix 2 on page 231.

¹⁹⁷ Although there is a range of possible times for these instructions to have been issued, 1156 seems most likely. The other notable candidate would be Amico di Murta’s 1168 mission. However, given their attachment to the 1155 treaty, and the intervening mission of Corso di Sigismundo between di Murta’s two missions, I favour the earlier date. Caffaro, *Caffaro, Genoa and the Twelfth-Century Crusades*, 167 & 213.

¹⁹⁸ *Nuova Serie*, 348, 355, 432; Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, 72.

except Rhōsia and Matracha, unless granted special permission by the Emperor. They are dated, and were clearly made in the Byzantine chancery. The only observation to make is that the 1169 chrysobull only survives due to being quoted wholly verbatim in the 1192 chrysobull of Isaac II Angelos. Clearly, both the Byzantines and the Genoese were concerned with trade in Rhōsia and Matracha. The Genoese wanted access to these markets for some as-yet-unknown reason, and the Byzantines were keen to prevent them from trading there at all, excepting very special circumstance which would require direct intervention of the Emperor himself.

Brătianu's Interpretation

Thus we are left with a somewhat singular prohibition. With the Rhōsia and Matracha clause, Constantinople had banned only a subset of Italian merchants from a pair of towns both obscure and distant, and possibly not even under direct Byzantine rule at this time.¹⁹⁹ In addition, this was not a hypothetical prohibition, but an active cause of friction in Byzantine-Genoese diplomacy. However, few historians have provided explanations for its inclusion in the chrysobull, and those proposed solutions have not satisfactorily resolved the important aspects of the clause.

Brătianu, the original Black Sea Byzantinist, suggested that the ban was to preserve a Constantinopolitan monopoly on Euxine fish, and furs from the Russian steppe; however, viewing this as an obvious and logical conclusion, he neglected to provide any evidence for it.²⁰⁰ Fish were, he believed, a necessary staple for supply of the imperial capital, and the Byzantines were worried about the Genoese usurping the trade and potentially starving the city.²⁰¹ However, this explanation suffers from several flaws. It would only make sense if Brătianu's assumption that the restriction referred to the whole Black Sea, and not merely two towns on its northern coast, but even aside from that, it also

¹⁹⁹ This is a matter of some historiographical debate. However, whether by direct rule or no, the Byzantines could control Italian-Euxine trade, as all ships would have to travel via the Bosphorus and Constantinople. For the arguments for and against Byzantine control, see: G.G. Litavrin, 'A propos de Tmutorokan', *Byzantion* 35 (1965), 221-234; and Kazhdan, 'Some little-known or misinterpreted evidence about Kievan Rus', 344-358.

²⁰⁰ Brătianu, *Recherches sur le Commerce Génois*, 50.

²⁰¹ Brătianu, *Recherches sur le Commerce Génois*, 55.

overlooks a few basic facts about the mundanity of fish. Firstly, the Genoese could get abundant fish almost literally on their own doorsteps; they thus had little incentive to engage in the long and dangerous journey to the farthest reaches of the Black Sea, with the primary intention being to purchase a variation on a domestic good. Such an expedition could not provide the necessary profit to counterbalance the effort and risk.²⁰² As a result, there is no record of Italians exporting salted fish westward until the 14th Century, when the 'Black Sea Boom' was in full swing, and the Italian merchants were travelling to the Black Sea in large numbers for other reasons, with fish being an incidental commodity.²⁰³

Alternatively, viewing the piscine trade 'from the other end', it could be that the clause was intended as a defence of supply of fish to Constantinople, and Byzantine internal markets. Such an interpretation is not ridiculous; after all, merchants from Constantinople have been recorded as "landing at the city of Matracha and sending their boats as far as the River Tanais [Don] in order to buy dried fish, namely sturgeon, shad, eel-pout and other fish in vast quantities", according to William of Rubruck; however, it is noteworthy that these merchants may not have been Greek, and were certainly not Byzantine subjects; Rubruck's journey lasted from 1253-55, when Constantinople was still controlled by the Latin Empire.²⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the described merchants could have been continuing a trade that dated from long before the Fourth Crusade and the establishment of the Latin Empire. It is difficult to believe, however, that Byzantium relied upon Black Sea fish as a key strategic resource for suppling the capital. Constantinople had sources of fish much closer to home, in the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus, which they could access even while under siege, and also the lake of Nicaea. If a Byzantine Emperor did wish to secure a supply of fish for his subjects, it would make far more sense to use one of these reservoirs, rather than two strange and distant towns at the entrance

²⁰² On the difficulty of the Italy-Black Sea voyage, see Nystazopolou-Pelekidis, 'Venice et la Mer Noire', 37.

²⁰³ Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204', 689.

²⁰⁴ William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 64.

to the Sea of Azov.²⁰⁵ Thus from both the Genoese and Byzantine perspectives, it is difficult to see why the trade in Black Sea fish would have been deemed important enough to attract Genoese merchants, or to require Byzantine protectionism.

Furs, perhaps, were a more reasonable proposal; there was a sizeable fur trade in the north-east Black Sea, localised to the Don river and its environs. However, there was also the trade outlet at Cherson, frequented by Rus' merchants, where furs could be purchased regardless of bans at Rhōsia or Matracha.²⁰⁶ However, for the sake of argument, let us assume that the bulk of the fur trade was conducted in the vicinity of the straits of Kerch. This fur trade was dominated by the Rus', who brought much of it to Constantinople, where the Genoese could easily purchase it, prohibition or no. It is possible that the Byzantines wanted to control this trade and focus it within their own city, but it seems unlikely. When one compares the controls put on the purchase and trade of silk in Constantinople, and the absence of evidence for similar (or indeed any) controls on fur purchases, then it becomes hard to believe that the Byzantines had such a large interest in this particular product.²⁰⁷ One must also consider the tax breaks they granted to the Genoese – in particular, the six-percentage-point cut in the *kommerkion* trade tax – which would significantly decrease their income on any fur purchased in Constantinople by the Genoese.²⁰⁸ Importantly, trade in Matracha did not preclude similar trade in Constantinople. This can be seen in Pegolotti's handbook for Black Sea merchants during the 'boom years' of the early 14th century. Both the Genoese and Venetians in this period had substantial trading centres in the Black Sea, at Caffa, Tana and Soldaia, among others; these depots would have been at the 'mouth' of the fur trade. Yet Pegolotti nonetheless records the

²⁰⁵ David Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers and the Black Sea before 1204', 689.

²⁰⁶ Further discussion on Cherson as a trade outlet will take place in both chapters 2 and 3..

²⁰⁷ Fur, skins and hides are not mentioned at all in the Book of the Eparch; by comparison, the regulations on various industries of silk take up four of the twenty-two chapters. This text is from the 9th century; however, fur was hardly a novel commodity, and it is hard to imagine that great regulatory changes took place in the intervening years. See *The Book of the Eparch*, edited by Jules Nicole, translated by E. H. Freshfield (London: Variorum Reprints, 1970).

²⁰⁸ *M&M*, vol. 3, 35.

sale of “undressed vairs [*furs from red squirrels*], and vair bellies and backs, Slavonian squirrels, martens and fitches [*polecats*]” for sale in Constantinople and Pera.²⁰⁹ Clearly, therefore, it is probable that any fur bought or sold in Matracha in the 12th century similarly had the potential to be resold in Constantinople. Indeed, it is possible that the Byzantines would have *preferred* the Genoese to be selling rather than buying furs in Constantinople, as then the purchaser would have had to pay the whole 10% *Kommerkion*, rather than the discounted Genoese rate of 4%.

Alternative Interpretations

Viewing Brătianu’s proposals as unsatisfactory, Ralph-Johannes Lilie made several suggestions himself; however, he provided only light coverage, and did not subject them to proper analysis. He offered three possibilities, being, in order of likelihood: that the Byzantines wished to maintain the Black Sea as a preserve for Byzantine shipping; that the Byzantines wished to prevent Italians from complicating the politics of the region²¹⁰; or that the Byzantines wished to force the Italians to trade through Constantinople, where they could be more easily monitored.²¹¹

However, none of these suggestions survive scrutiny. In the first two of Lilie’s suggestions, the proposed aim could only be achieved if the Byzantines also banned Venetians (and Pisans) from Rhōsia and Matracha. Even assuming that Byzantine trade was a significant consideration in the region, the Venetians would be able to seize the market just as easily as the Genoese; equally, the Venetians could just as easily complicate the politics of the steppe, as indeed they would do in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. As for the desire to keep an eye on Italians in Constantinople, this seems an illogical rationale – all Italian trade in the Black Sea by necessity returned through the Bosphorus anyway,

²⁰⁹ Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. Allan Evans (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy Books, 1936), 38-40. The translation above is a summary of these pages, *sans* measures and prices, from: Francesco Balducci Pegolotti, *Practica della Mercatura*, trans. Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, in *Cathay and the Way Thither* (London: 1916). Accessed: <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/pegol.html>.

²¹⁰ This argument is also advanced by Michel Balard, ‘Il Mar Nero, Venezia e l’occidente intorno al 1200’, in *Venedig und die Weltwirtschaft um 1200*, ed Wolfgang von Stromer (Stuttgart: Jan Thorbecke, 1999), 197.

²¹¹ Lilie, *Handel und Politik* 142. The ordering is Lilie’s.

which would almost certainly mean a stopover in Constantinople, where all Italian merchants had quarters. It is hard to believe that the Emperor would not have had less bizarre and more effective ways of keeping an eye on Italian merchants – for instance, requiring ships passing Constantinople from the Black Sea to stop over in the city (assuming such stops were not already commonplace). A similar requirement would later be demanded by the Ottomans, and Venice herself insisted her merchants stop over at Modon and Coron when passing these ‘Eyes of the Republic’.²¹² In addition, this does not explain why Rhōsia and Matracha, specifically, were prohibited.

A further flaw in Lilie’s argument was the suggestion that Silk Road merchandise was the determining factor in the diplomacy of Black Sea trade. This can be dismissed swiftly; the Silk Road was only a minor part of Black Sea commerce during this period, and would remain so until the arrival of the Mongols and the collapse of the Crusader States, both of which made Syria and Outremer in general a much less inviting place for merchants. This had not taken place in 1155, and would not until the 1200s, after the Rhōsia and Matracha clause had become irrelevant due to the fall of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade.²¹³ Until that time, the Silk Road met the Black Sea only at Trebizond; and the commodities of the Silk Road would account only for a fraction of that city’s commerce – a sizeable fraction, but a fraction nonetheless.²¹⁴ Given the limited impact of the Silk Road on pre-Fall Euxine commerce, it could not possibly be a motivation for the Rhōsia and Matracha clause.

The most recent attempt at explaining the Rhōsia and Matracha clause is an article by Jacoby, which took a novel stance on the topic. Revisiting the text of the clause, Jacoby argued that although “Rhōsia and Matracha” does likely refer to Nystazopolou-Pelekidis’ towns (Bosporos-Kerch and Taman), or similar ones, the unusual phrasing of the clause has been misinterpreted. The Genoese were *not*

²¹² Martin, ‘The First Venetians in the Black Sea’, 116.

²¹³ Lilie, *Handel und Politik*, 141-2; Virgil Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. Samuel Wilcocks (Boston, MA: Brill, 2012), 87; Angeliki E. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins: The Foreign Policy of Andronikos II, 1282-1328* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 67.

²¹⁴ For more on this, see Chapter 3, on page 199.

prevented from trading in these towns; rather, they were prevented from taking their own ships along the northern coast of the Black Sea towards those towns.²¹⁵ He proposes this was to ensure that the Genoese would have to unload their goods in Constantinople, in order to load them onto their own ships for the journey home. This would enable Constantinople to better monitor the import and export of Black Sea goods, and particularly grain, an essential commodity which was strategically important to the Empire.²¹⁶ This is similar to, but distinct from, Lilie's argument; Lilie suggested the goods were bought and sold in Constantinople; Jacoby believes they were merely loaded and unloaded.

This argument is a little more compelling. In the restored Byzantine Empire, post-1261, the grain trade took on a dominating role in diplomacy. The city of Constantinople came to rely upon Black Sea grain transported by Genoese and Venetian merchants, which left them vulnerable to profiteering and extortion – opportunities which the Genoese especially were not remiss in exploiting. With such hindsight, attempting to pre-emptively keep control of the Black Sea grain trade was a wise strategic decision, for which the Byzantines should be praised.²¹⁷ However, Jacoby's argument is not without difficulties. There is an assumption that by the inclusion of "ships" [πλοῖα in the Greek text; *naves/navigia* in the Latin texts], the chrysobull is deviating from the standard treaty form with express intent to convey a different meaning; but it is hard to believe, even with the Genoese being latecomers to Constantinopolitan trade, that the Byzantines had standard or standardised treaty forms.²¹⁸ The inclusion of "ships" is unusual, as it does not appear in corresponding treaties for the Venetians and Pisans; however, this could be no more than a different turn of phrase to denote the usual agreement.²¹⁹ In addition, Jacoby tries to stress that the Byzantine focus is on journeys and cabotage, rather than destination. This already seems unlikely given the precision implied by the

²¹⁵ Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers and the Black Sea Before 1204', 679-680.

²¹⁶ Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers and the Black Sea Before 1204', 693-699.

²¹⁷ Julian Chrysostomides, 'Venetian commercial privileges under the Palaeologi', in *Julian Chrysostomides: Byzantium and Venice, 1204-1453 – Collected Studies*, ed. Michael Heslop and Charalambos Dendrinos (London: Variorum, 2011), 267.

²¹⁸ *M&M* vol. 3, 35; *Nuova Serie* 355, 360, 432.

²¹⁹ *M&M*, vol 3. 3-24; *T&T* vol. 1, 51-55.

mention of specific towns, and the fact that there are two such towns specified, rather than simply one, which is all that would be necessary for implied direction. More damagingly, however, the grammar does not support this proposal. The construction in the Greek is “ἐν” with the dative; in the Latin, it is “in” with the ablative. In both cases, this does not indicate ‘motion towards’, but rather ‘location in’ or ‘within’. Thus Jacoby’s emphasis on textual analysis to support his stress on journey over destination seems unconvincing.

Even if Byzantine supervision of the grain trade had been a concern, for the reasons noted above, this clause would not appear to be an effective means of enforcing this aim. The Venetians would also have been able to trade in the Black Sea without having to stop in Constantinople to ‘trans-ship’ their grain. However, either they would stop in Constantinople anyway (as seems likely for medieval sea travel), in which case, the clause was unnecessary; or they would not stop in Constantinople, and not be subject to Byzantine monitoring, and thus a great quantity of the grain trade would be unobservable for the Emperor, rendering the clause ineffective. Jacoby attempts to explain this difference away by suggesting that only the Genoese were interested in the Black Sea grain trade. This, he suggests, is borne out by Martin da Canal, who describes a famine that beset Venice in 1268, resulting in Venice searching further afield for grain: “Tartars, Alans, Circassians, Russians, Armenians and Greeks gave food to the Venetians at this time.”²²⁰ All these peoples lived on the coasts of the Black Sea; this appears to be the first time the Venetians engaged in significant grain trade in this region.²²¹ However, we must not succumb to hindsight. Grain was a commodity which was always in demand, and could usually turn a good profit.²²² If Jacoby’s suggestion were correct, it would thus be a great risk for Byzantium to assume that the Venetians would not engage in trafficking cereals from the Black Sea, and therefore not include such a clause in the Venetian treaty; at any moment, their

²²⁰ Martin da Canal, *Les Estoires de Venise*, trans. Laura K. Morreale (Padua: Unipress, 2009), 123.

²²¹ David Jacoby, ‘The Byzantine Outsider in Trade, c. 900-1350’, in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed. Dion C. Smythe (London: Ashgate, 1998), 144.

²²² John L. Teall ‘The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire, 330-1025’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), 93-4.

careful diplomacy could have been thwarted by an opportunistic Venetian convoy. This seems an unlikely gamble on Byzantium's part.

In addition, the specificity of the locations of the clause goes against Jacoby's claim. It was possible to buy grain from Rhōsia and from Matracha; however, there were many better places in the Black Sea from which to buy cereals. Grain trade in the north and north-east of the Black Sea was not significant before the 12th century, as neither the Khazars nor the Rus' exported that commodity.²²³ When exports of grain do become significant, it is not the Sea of Azov which is the most important provider. An anonymous Florentine trading manual from c.1315 highlights the key regions as being Varna and Sozopol, with the best grain coming from Maurocastron, all in the western half of the Black Sea.²²⁴ At the peak of the Black Sea grain trade, it was the Genoese colony of Caffa, in the Crimea, that provided the bulk of the cereal products; by contrast, their colony at Tana in the Sea of Azov provided relatively little grain.²²⁵ The dearth of cereal products from the northern coasts of the Black Sea is made most clear by Constantine Porphyrogenetos' advice on how to handle a rebellion at the Crimean town of Cherson. He emphasises the importance of starving the Chersonites out by restricting their grain supplies, for "if grain does not pass across from Amisos and from Paphlagonia and the Boukellarioi [theme] and the flanks of the Armenaikoi, the Chersonites cannot live".²²⁶ Amisos *et al* are all regions on the northern coast of Asia Minor, and it is from here that the Chersonites were apparently getting the bulk of their grain – not the much closer towns of Rhōsia and Matracha.²²⁷ Thus Jacoby's underlying argument, that control of the trade to and from the towns of Rhōsia and Matracha, would

²²³ Michel Balard, 'Le commerce du blé en mer Noire', 65. For more on the Rus' and grain exports, see Chapter 2, on page 119.

²²⁴ Balard, 'Le commerce du blé en mer Noire', 66; Robert-Henri Bautier, "Les relations économiques des Occidentaux avec les pays d'Orient au Moyen Age", in *Sociétés et compagnies de commerce en Orient et dans l'océan Indien. Actes du 8^e Colloque international d'Histoire maritime (Beyrouth: 5-10 Septembre 1966)* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1970), 314-6.

²²⁵ Michel Balard, 'Genuensis Civitas in Extremo Europae: Caffa from the Fourteenth to the Fifteenth Century', in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 148.

²²⁶ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 286-7.

²²⁷ *De Administrando Imperio Volume II – Commentary*, 209.

allow the Byzantines to control the Black Sea grain trade, is unreasonable. Such a clause would logically have to refer to either the whole Black Sea, or the primary grain markets in Romania and the western Ukraine; Rhōsia and Matracha were relatively insignificant in this regard, and a clause applied only to them would be ineffective in pursuit of such a goal.

Therefore no explanation by Jacoby, Lilie or Brătianu holds firm when scrutinized; they all fail to provide a full and logical explanation for the Rhōsia and Matracha clause. We must therefore look for another. Any consistent explanation for the inclusion and enforcement of the clause must address two key questions. Why were Rhōsia and Matracha, obscure as they are, specifically the prohibited destinations? And why were the Genoese, and not the Venetians, subjects of this prohibition?

Holy Fire: The Unique Selling Point of Cimmerian Bosphoros

The first component of the ban that must be addressed is that of destination – what it was that was so important about the Straits of Kerch that Byzantium would prohibit the Genoese from visiting them. Since the concern is with Genoese trade, it seems natural to examine what could be bought there – and, due to the specificity of the ban, what could be bought *only* there. In essence, we need to identify Rhōsia and Matracha's 'USP', or 'Unique Selling Point'. As noted above, fish, fur and grain, among other suggestions, have been posited as the key resource which motivated the Rhōsia and Matracha clause. However, none of these commodities fulfil the necessary criteria that would justify it – they are either not unique to the Straits of Kerch, or they have no strategic importance to Byzantium, or both.

There is, however, a commodity which has been overlooked by many historians, but fits our criteria perfectly. Evidence suggests that it was abundant around Matracha, but rare if not entirely absent elsewhere in Byzantium; it was of great strategic importance to the Empire; and there was already a substantial but localised trade in the product. It is the eternal catalyst of geopolitics – oil.

The availability of crude oil, or naphtha, in Byzantium is helpfully itemised by Constantine Porphyrogenetos, who goes into some detail on the subject.²²⁸ He lists a total of 13 wells yielding naphtha, giving precise locations, and even recording the colour of oil produced.²²⁹ One is located in the region of “Derzene” [Δερζηνή], which can be placed somewhere on the border of the modern Turkish provinces of Erzincan and Erzurum.²³⁰ The second is more difficult to locate. Porphyrogenetos places it in the province of “Tziliapert” (Τζιλιάπερτ), below the village of Srechiabarax (Σρεχιαβαράξ). It is not entirely clear to where this refers. Jenkins locates it near modern Bayburt, based on a potential corruption of “τὸ Πάϊπερτε”, but does so hesitantly.²³¹ Oikonomedes claimed it was near modern Gjuljabert/Üçyol, on the Turkey-Georgia borderland; and Cheynet, based on analysis of lead seals, places it somewhere else, in a pass somewhere on the eastern Byzantine frontier.²³² In all three cases, it is in the farthest reaches of Asia Minor. This fits with the classical name for naphtha, used in some earlier sources, of “Medean Oil”, suggesting a historical connection with Asia Minor and Persia.²³³ Constantine recorded these two wells, under Byzantine control, in 952, two centuries before the Rhōsia and Matracha clause was first considered. In the intervening years, Byzantium had lost control of much of Asia Minor to the Seljuqs, and was left in possession of only sections of the northern coast and eastern reaches. Thus the Empire had certainly lost control of these two wells by the time Genoa entered the mercantile scene.

The remaining wells listed by Constantine – all 11 of them – are located in or around Matracha.²³⁴ In Matracha and Zichia, surface naphtha was abundant – indeed, for some it was the defining

²²⁸ The word ‘naphtha’ refers to a range of flammable hydrocarbon-based liquids, varying greatly over time and between cultures. Here, it is used as Byzantine sources do, i.e. to refer to a generic crude oil mixture. The Greek terminology is curious: in *De Administrando*, the word used is ἄφθα; however, by the time of Komnene, the apparent accepted nomenclature was νάφθα.

²²⁹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 285. Different colours of crude oil are caused by various impurities imparted by the minerals through which the oil passed on its way to the surface.

²³⁰ *De Administrando Imperio Volume II – Commentary*, 208-9.

²³¹ *De Administrando Imperio Volume II – Commentary*, 208-9.

²³² Jean-Claude Cheynet ‘De Tziliapert à Sébastè’, *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 9 (2006), 213-215.

²³³ See, for example, Kinnamos, *Historiarum*, 283. He describes the Venetians threatened with “Μηδικῶ Πυρὶ”.

²³⁴ *De Administrando Imperio Volume II – Commentary*, 208-9

characteristic of the region; it is not for nothing that Mas'ūdī called it “the naphtha coast”²³⁵. No other wells are mentioned in *De Administrando*, implying that these were the only wells in Byzantine possession at the time. As the Empire had not conquered any substantial new territory in the intervening years, this means that – barring the unlikely possibility that some lucky Byzantine had struck oil – the only place in Byzantium where naphtha was available to merchants, was Matracha and its environs. Anyone who wished to buy it would have to travel to the northern reaches of the Black Sea.

Constantine does not explain why he goes into such detail on naphtha wells – it is the only commodity, excluding grain, which he discusses. However, the uses of naphtha were not many. It had a small variety of everyday uses, such as waterproofing ships, or providing for domestic lighting, but Constantine would hardly have been interested in such mundanities. Much more relevant to him would have been the strategic role naphtha played, due to its military importance. It was as a key ingredient in the recipe for Liquid Fire, allegedly the invention of a certain Kallinikos, more commonly known as ‘Greek Fire’, a name given to it by the Crusaders.²³⁶ Although the formulation has long since been lost, chemical analysis and experiments suggest it was based primarily on naphtha oil, possibly with resin and quicklime mixed in, in order to increase its combat effectiveness.²³⁷ It was a dramatic and effective weapon, as demonstrated by Anna Komnene’s account of its use against the Pisans in 1107:

[The Pisans have amassed a fleet of 900 ships headed to Syria]. On hearing this the Emperor [Alexios] ordered ships to be furnished... As he knew that the Pisans were

²³⁵ Arabic “an-Naffāṭa”, النفاطة. Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, ed. Pellat, vol. 1, 166.

²³⁶ Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, trans. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 494; Alex Roland, ‘Secrecy, Technology, and War: Greek Fire and the Defense of Byzantium, 678-1204’, *Technology and Culture* 33.4 (1992), 655.

²³⁷ H. R. Ellis Davidson, ‘The Secret Weapon of Byzantium’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 66 (1973), 70; J. Haldon and M. Byrne, ‘A possible solution to the problem of Greek Fire’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 70 (1977), 92; Komnene, *Alexiad*, 392.

skilled in warfare and dreaded a battle with them, on the prow of each ship he had a head fixed of a lion or other land-animal, made in brass or iron with its mouth open and then gilded over, so that their mere aspect was terrifying. And the fire which was to be directed against the enemy through tubes he made to pass through the mouths of the beasts, so that it seemed as if the lions and the other similar monsters were vomiting the fire. [*They meet the Pisans between Patara and Rhodes, and use the weapon*]... The barbarians now became thoroughly alarmed, firstly because of the fire directed upon them (for they were not accustomed to that kind of machine, nor to a fire, which naturally flames upwards, but in this case was directed in whatever direction the sender desired, often downwards or laterally)... and consequently they fled.²³⁸

The weapon was not only effective on a physical level, but also had a huge psychological impact on its victims. Nowhere is this more clear than in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, which states that unsuspecting sailors were led to believe that the Byzantines could “call down lightning from heaven”.²³⁹ Similar weapons were also employed against the Normans in defence of Durazzo, on one occasion to destroy a siege tower, and on another against tunnelling sappers²⁴⁰. ‘Proper’ Liquid Fire, however, was a naval weapon, propelled by a sort of proto-flame-thrower from a system of siphons.²⁴¹

This weapon’s success was dependent upon its secrecy. Its psychological effect, in part, required an element of surprise and confusion – the impossibility of fire burning downwards, due to the siphons, and being unhampered by water, due to its formula, would have terrified many a medieval soldier or

²³⁸ Komnene, *Alexiad* 350-1; Dawes, *The Alexiad* 292-93.

²³⁹ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 158-159.

²⁴⁰ Komnene, *Alexiad*, 126-8.

²⁴¹ Full discussion of enigmatic Liquid Fire, though fascinating, is largely out of place here. We shall focus primarily on its formula and the strategic and diplomatic repercussions thereof; for discussion of the weapon’s role in war, and its deployment, the reader is referred to the articles cited above: that by Haldon and Byrne for the practical solutions, and that by Roland for the cultural context.

sailor. It was not just psychological concerns, however, that necessitated mystery. Its effectiveness as a combat weapon also depended upon it. Just a single encounter with Liquid Fire could provide its one-time victims with the necessary information to be prepared for it on the second occasion. Even without any apparent knowledge of its secret, Arab fleets were able to build up a rudimentary defence to it in the late 7th and early 8th centuries, through use of soaked coverings. While not completely effective, they provided some measure of protection.²⁴² The Venetians, fleeing imperial vessels in 1171, “because they were familiar with Roman ways”, defeated an attack of Liquid Fire by “dipping some cloth in vinegar and wrapping the whole ship in it...[the fire,] reaching the vessel, was repelled by the cloth”.²⁴³

These ramshackle defences provided a limited defence to Liquid Fire, although it appears that the weapon described by Kinnamos was a less effective version.²⁴⁴ Given Liquid Fire’s propensity to burn anything and everything with which it came into contact, such a defence would only work effectively if the entire ship – hull, masts and deck and all – as well as those upon it, were coated in vinegar-cloth, a scenario which presents obvious practical problems, not only in implementation but also in practice. This also does nothing to allay the psychological impact of the weapon – indeed, the ship constantly reeking of vinegar may only amplify the fears of its crew. Suggestions of obsolescence as a result of this failed attack are therefore overly pessimistic.

Defence of the secret remained paramount. Detailed knowledge of the ingredients involved would only make it easier for ingenious military engineers to design more effective defences against Liquid Fire. In addition, we should also not overlook the simple fact that if Byzantium’s enemies did not know

²⁴² Roland, ‘Secrecy, Technology and War’, 672.

²⁴³ Kinnamos, *Historiarum*, 283. Translation by Brand, from Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 212.

²⁴⁴ This is indicated by two aspects of the weapon described. Firstly, the fire is inaccurate, overshooting on some occasions and falling short on others – a far cry from the accurate weapon described in Komnene and the *Taktika*. In addition, the Fire, falling in the water, is quenched (ἐσβέννυτο). One of the defining characteristics of Liquid Fire was that it continued to burn on water. Kinnamos, *Historiarum*, 283; Komnene, *Alexiad* 350-1; J. R. Partington, *A History of Greek Fire and Gunpowder* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1960), 15-18.; Ellis Davidson, ‘Secret Weapon’, 61.

how to manufacture the weapon, they could not employ it against the Empire themselves. As a result, the Imperial court took their 'Military Secrets Act' very seriously. The Byzantine dedication to this secrecy is exemplified by a passage of Constantine Porphyrogennetos, exhorted his son, the future emperor, to maintain Liquid Fire's clandestine nature:

He who should dare give of this fire to another nation should neither be called a Christian, nor be held worthy of any rank or office; and if he should be the holder of any such, he should be expelled therefrom and anathematized and made an example for ever and ever, whether he were an emperor, or patriarch, or any other man whatever, either ruler or subject, who should seek to transgress against this commandment. And [the great and holy Constantine, the first Christian emperor] abjured all who had zeal and fear of God to be prompt to make away with him who attempted to do this, as a common enemy and a transgressor of this great commandment, and to dismiss him to a death most hateful and cruel. And it happened once, as wickedness will still find room, that one of our military governors, who had been most heavily bribed by certain infidels, handed over some of this fire to them, and, since God could not endure to leave unavenged this transgression, as he was about to enter the holy church of God, fire came down from heaven and consumed him utterly.²⁴⁵

However, there were complications in attempting to keep the formula for Liquid Fire secret. As noted above, naphtha was also a domestic product, with a multitude of uses, primarily waterproofing and lighting. One curious use, as yet unaccounted for, is the inclusion of "flat cakes" or "sticks" of naphtha resin in graves.²⁴⁶ As a result of these manifold uses, there was a significant naphtha industry in regions

²⁴⁵ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 69-71.

²⁴⁶ Shepard, 'Closer Encounters', 24-5; K. V. Kostin, 'Находки остатков нефти в археологических памятниках северного Причерноморья' ['Findings of residues of naphtha-oil in the archaeological monuments of northern Pontic littoral'], *Sovetskaia arkheologija* 1975, 208-9.

where it was available, such as Matracha. Archaeological expeditions in the north-eastern Black Sea have found dozens of examples of a specialised amphora. Made of red clay, tall and narrow, with distinctive handles, they date at the earliest from the 8th century and become most common in the 11th century. Most of them are found with a particular kind of resin either coating them, or impregnated into the material of the amphora itself. Spectrographic analysis indicates that this is residue from naphtha oil; moreover, the various impurities in this particular naphtha indicate that it was taken from the reserves around the Taman peninsula.²⁴⁷ These amphora have been found throughout the hinterland of the north-east Euxine – Sarkel, the Sea of Azov, and the north-east coast of the Crimea, but they are most common on the Taman peninsula, particularly the remains of the fortress at Matracha. Shepard hypothesises, quite sensibly, that they were made on the peninsula itself – this seems a highly likely suggestion.²⁴⁸ All of this suggests a localised (exclusively intra-Euxine) but highly productive naphtha trade in and around Matracha during our period.²⁴⁹

Domestic naphtha and ‘weapons-grade’ naphtha, as would be used for Liquid Fire, are not quite the identical. The latter requires the more volatile molecules of the olefins and (naturally) naphthalenes. However, when crude oil, oozing up from a natural well, reaches the surface, these molecules quickly begin to evaporate. What is left is the tarry, less flammable substance more commonly associated with ‘crude oil’, which is fine for domestic use, but hardly combustible and dangerous enough for Kallinikos’ patented formulation. We do not have any direct source describing the Byzantine process for gathering the ingredients and preparing Liquid Fire; however, harvesting ‘weapons-grade’ naphtha is not complicated. It is merely a matter of timing. To ensure that the volatile molecules have not yet evaporated, the naphtha must be gathered during colder times – early in the morning, or on winter

²⁴⁷ Kostrin, ‘Находки остатков нефти’, 209-10; K. V. Kostrin, ‘Исследование смолистого вещества из «чёрносмоленных» кувшинов средневековой тмутакани» [‘Investigation of the resinous substance from the “black-tarred” amphora of medieval Tmutarokan’], *Sovetskaia arkheologija* 1967, 287-8.

²⁴⁸ Shepard, ‘Closer Encounters’, 24-5.

²⁴⁹ Kostrin, ‘Находки остатков нефти’, 210.

days.²⁵⁰ Then, to preserve its volatility, the oil must be swiftly sealed in airtight containers, preventing further evaporation; hence Choniates' epithet, "that Fluid Fire, which sleeps away in sealed flasks".²⁵¹ Whilst this is not a complex procedure, it requires a certain degree of knowledge and experience. The flammability of naphtha may be obvious to all who encounter it, but the knack for harvesting the oil before it 'goes bad' would likely be only known to those who dealt with it regularly, and had the chance to observe its decay – that is to say, naphtha merchants, such as those selling the product in Matracha. There are a few points to note here. Firstly, naphtha, as a product with a variety of domestic uses, was in high demand; fortunately, it was correspondingly abundant in Matracha. These factors would have made it difficult for the Imperial authorities to restrict its sale, especially given how far away Matracha is from Constantinople. However, fortunately for the Liquid Fire secret-keepers, most, if not all, of this privately-sold and privately-bought naphtha would have surely been unfit for military usage. As the more volatile form of the oil was not necessary for day-to-day usage, there was no reason to go to the effort of harvesting it at the specific times that unevaporated oil was available. Moreover, if it was, by chance or design, harvested during those specific periods, to maintain its volatility it would have been necessary to seal it with all speed in an airtight jar – a small but significant extra effort that would, again, be unnecessary for domestic use. Were volatile oil harvested, and sold locally for domestic usage, it could not have then been later repackaged for use in Liquid Fire, as the essential molecules would have evaporated within hours, let alone the days necessary for transport and sale. Thus any purchase of military-grade naphtha would have to be done with intent, and done locally. The naphtha would have to have been harvested and sealed at or near Matracha – it could not be bought 'second-hand' or having been repurposed, from a merchant elsewhere.

²⁵⁰ Haldon and Byrne, 'A Possible Solution', 92.

²⁵¹ Choniates, *Historiae*, 391; Roland, 'Secrecy, Technology and War', 662. The Greek phrase is "τὸ ὑγρὸν πῦρ, ὃ ἐπὶ τοῖς στέγουσιν ἀφυπνοῦν σκεύει".

Thus in Matracha we have an abundance of naphtha, a specialist commodity which could not be bought elsewhere in the Empire at all. It was a popular product across the region, and would no doubt attract middlemen who could sell the product further afield, should there ever be a market for oil. However, there were also military concerns for this product – it was necessary to keep the role which naphtha played in Liquid Fire secret, as well as the knowledge required for harvesting weapons-grade naphtha; if this secret were not maintained, the Byzantine weapon would be far less effective, or worse, used against the Empire. However, this substantial existing trade, combined with the distance from Constantinople, made it impossible for the emperor to easily regulate and control this industry itself. Thus, in order to keep control of naphtha, it was necessary for Byzantium to control who visited Matracha and the surrounding areas, especially those who would be interested in trading Matrachan produce.

iv. Mixing the Ingredients – Conclusion

Let us combine all the elements of the Rhōsia and Matracha concoction. In Matracha we have a significant and well-established industry of naphtha harvest and sale, no doubt conducted by experienced individuals familiar with their product. Attempts to restrict the sale of the product would be difficult, nigh unenforceable. Standard, crude naphtha might not be a concern for the Imperial court, but the margin between domestic naphtha and weapons-grade naphtha was narrow. The harvester had to be precise, but ultimately the difference was one only of timing and knowledge. Thus there is no doubt that the right salesman, far from the capital and the imperial eye, might well be induced, for the right price, to sell ‘enriched’ naphtha to some inquisitive, or inimical, buyer – in short, to turn to rogue arms dealing. He may be breaking commandments both imperial and divine, but the effort involved would be slim, the profits glorious, and the risk of being caught minimal. This security of this part of the secret of Liquid Fire, and supply of its crucial ingredient, was all too fragile.

Meanwhile the Genoese seemed unduly close to the much-feared Norman enemy. They had rebuffed Byzantine overtures, negotiated (apparently) in bad faith, and secured favourable agreements with

the threatening Regno, reinforcing already close ties. They might have professed neutrality, and signed pacts of non-aggression, but could these new Italians truly be trusted? Westerners had broken treaties with Constantinople time and again. Venice could be relied upon at least not to help the Normans, even if their loyalty to Byzantium flickered on occasion. But unlike the Venetians, the Genoese had no geopolitical fears of an expansive, pan-Adriatic Norman kingdom to keep them faithful to the cause. Since an alliance could not be induced, it was necessary for Constantinople to try and buy their neutrality – a combined Genoese-Norman force could hardly be resisted. But even when they had bought the Genoese non-aggression, it would have been foolish to rely on the loyalty and honour of an untested friend, an unknown variable. It would be doubly foolish to grant them access to a weak point in the Byzantine defensive web, such as the unregulated naphtha industry of Matracha. Even aside from their closeness to the Regno, there was the further possibility of Genoa being pressganged into the service of the Reich, where they would provide the fleet for Barbarossa's much-feared invasion of Byzantium. Thus even after the Byzantine-Norman peace of 1158, the rise of the Reich still rendered Genoa a questionable ally at best, and a potential enemy at worst.

Since it was impossible to prevent the Genoese from purchasing naphtha, it was necessary to prevent them from visiting the region entirely. This would not only prevent them from buying weapons-grade naphtha themselves, it would also mean that they would not engage in dealings with the naphtha harvesters, and discover the secret to enriched oil. That, in turn, was the only way the Emperor could be sure that the Genoese would not then sell on that oil – and the secrets which it held – to Byzantium's enemies, especially the Normans.

This, then, explains the bizarre specifications of the Rhōsia and Matracha clause. These two towns, important trading destinations which would attract foreign merchants, were the only places in greater Byzantium that those merchants would be able to procure the secret to one of the linchpins of Constantinople's defence. This region could potentially be visited only by seafaring mercantile powers – in practice, the Venetians and Genoese. Of these two republics, only the Genoese were at risk of

selling on that oil on to the Normans , in whose hands it would pose a significant, even existential, threat to the Byzantine empire. Thus the Byzantines took the logical and necessary step of securing their secret. The Genoese were prohibited from going to the centre of naphtha production, and that element of Liquid Fire was thus protected and held secret from Byzantium's enemies.

v. Epilogue – Italian in Practice?

Such, therefore, is the 'theory' of Italians in the Black Sea before the Fall of Constantinople in 1204. However, it remains to be seen how this came out in practice. The Genoese and Venetians may have had legal access to the Black Sea, to varying degrees, but it is unclear whether they actually took advantage of it. The historiographical consensus appears to be that they did not. To quote Martin's 'recantation': "Until the Fourth Crusade... no sail of the Italian states, of Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa, Ancona or Venice was descried upon [the Black Sea's] waters... [contrary] arguments have met with indignant dismissal or more sorrowful reproach."²⁵² Lacking a wealth of concrete evidence, historians are naturally hesitant to set themselves to the assertion that Italian merchants entered the Black Sea earlier than is definitely known. Such hesitancy can be easily understood. Prior to the Fourth Crusade, there are no surviving contracts, Venetian or Genoese, which detail commercial activity in the Black Sea. Aside from the above-discussed Rhōsia and Matracha clause, there is no specific mention of Euxine or Pontic territories in the Venetian- or Genoese-Byzantine diplomatic record. No Byzantine chronicle refers to such trade, nor do Italian annals. No shipwrecks have been found of Italian origin, nor other archaeological evidence. Scant does not cover it – there is a genuine dearth of such evidence. However, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Whilst there is no clear fingerprint of Italian activity in the Euxine before 1204, creative reading of certain sources can provide hints of their presence, slight and speculative though they may be.

²⁵² Martin, 'The Venetians in the Black Sea: a General Survey', 227.

It is necessary to be aware of one's own biases. I approached this problem - the initial starting point of this thesis - from the position that there surely was some Italian activity in the Black Sea before the Fall of Constantinople, and that it should be possible to find some evidence corroborating this; such a position was based on the premise that the Rhōsia and Matracha clause would not have attracted such effort on the part of the Genoese embassies, had not there been a significant interest in the Black Sea on the part of the Genoese merchant-sailors, and that such an interest would likely be mirrored by Venetian merchants. However, despite much searching, I was unable to find any direct evidence of such interest being acted upon. However, without evidence to the contrary, I still hold to the position that Italians were engaged in Euxine trade prior to the Fourth Crusade: not to any great extent, perhaps, and certainly not to the degree which they later would through the sea, but nonetheless a small but substantial mercantile presence seems highly likely to me.

Such a position cannot be held without an explanation for why there is currently no surviving documentation of Italian activity in the Black Sea. Italian merchants usually provide an substantial paper-trail regarding their commercial activities; thus the absence of any such material is potentially damning. Moreover, almost immediately *after* the Fourth Crusade, the paper trail is apparent – a contract worth 100 hyperpyra, concluded in Constantinople between Petrus de Ferragudo and Zacharias Stagnarius, for a trade mission to Sudaq on the Crimean coast.²⁵³ How can this absence of documentation be justified? Jacoby's proposal seems to be a strong one. It is first worth noting that, although there is a 'paper trail' after the Fourth Crusade, it is a thin one. There are only 3 notarial charters demonstrating Venetian activity in the sea for the period 1206-1231, and none for the period 1233-1261. Similarly, there are only 32 surviving Venetian contracts referring to trade between Constantinople and any other destination, during the period 1204-1222; none of them mention the Black Sea.²⁵⁴ Nonetheless, Venetian activity in both Constantinople and the Black Sea, both of which

²⁵³ Lilie, *Handel und Politik*, 136-7.

²⁵⁴ David Jacoby, 'The Economy of Latin Constantinople', in *Urbs Capta: The Fourth Crusade and its Consequences*, ed. Angeliki Laiou (Paris; Lethielleux, 2005), 201.

were now dominated by their semi-puppet, the Latin Empire, must surely have been spiked. Jacoby states that there “assuredly” must have been more documentation for such trade activity, drawn up in Constantinople.²⁵⁵ There the Italian merchants had permanent quarters and could engage their compatriots who resided in the city to join or lead their mercantile expeditions. There would be no reason for such contracts to be replicated or taken to back to Italy.²⁵⁶

Jacoby notes that the Latin quarters of Constantinople were subject to a surprising level of violence despite their safety inside the walls of the city. the Genoese quarter was attacked by Greeks and rival Italians in 1162; again by Venetians in 1171; then the arrest of Venetians (and flight of those who escaped) in that same year; 1182 saw a Greek attack on the Genoese and Pisan districts, and then there was a brief interlude before the anti-Latin activity and subsequent capture of Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade.²⁵⁷ In addition, the fires during the Crusader captures of the city certainly destroyed the Venetian quarter. Many contracts and notarial documents must surely have been lost in the fires and assaults. Furthermore, after the recapture of Constantinople in 1261, the Venetian residences were burned down, once again likely destroying much of what must have been a “substantial” amount of documentation.²⁵⁸ These fires and assaults, not to mention the turbulence of a further 800 years, place a considerable strain on the potential survival of any mercantile documents.

We must further consider the degree of interest which the Venetians, and other Italians, had in the Black Sea. It is sometimes suggested (for example, by Thiriet) that the Venetians were either barred from, or had no interest in, the Black Sea, based on the chrysobull of 1082.²⁵⁹ This Chrysobull enumerates a list of 32 places in which the Venetians are specifically granted rights to trade. This list includes no Black Sea port.²⁶⁰ Therefore, the Venetians had no right to trade in the Black Sea – so goes

²⁵⁵ Jacoby, ‘The Economy of Latin Constantinople’, 200-201.

²⁵⁶ Jacoby, ‘Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204’, 687.

²⁵⁷ Jacoby, ‘Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204’, 687.

²⁵⁸ Jacoby, ‘The Economy of Latin Constantinople’, 202.

²⁵⁹ Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne*, 39.

²⁶⁰ *T&T*, vol. 1, 52-3.

the argument. However, the list in the chrysobull is demonstrably not an exclusive one. The list does not include either Halmyros or Crete, and yet there is evidence of the Venetians trading in significant quantities in both locations.²⁶¹ Similarly, a bull granted to the Pisans in 1111 only mentions the right to trade in Constantinople and the Aegean islands; however, the Pisans are found owning both private and communal property in Thessalonica and Halmyros.²⁶² This would, of course, include the Black Sea, and such Pontic harbours as the Emperor could lay claim to at the moment in question. It is also possible that the list in the bull is instead concerned with the Venetian's freedom from tax, rather than right of trade, which was Martin's interpretation.²⁶³ If this were the case, the Venetians would nonetheless have been able to enter the Black Sea, as the Genoese demands regarding Matracha would suggest, and it would not demonstrate a lack of interest in the Black Sea on the Venetians' part. It follows, therefore, that the lists included in the chrysobulls are not exclusive. It may have been that trade exemptions were only valid within the described ports, as Jacoby and others have suggested, although the Chrysobull does not state this; however, even in this case, Venetians were allowed to trade throughout the Byzantine Empire.²⁶⁴ This would naturally include such Black Sea ports as the Empire controlled, along the northern coast of Anatolia, and in the Crimea and the Cimmerian Bosphoros. The emphasis should therefore be placed on the concluding phrase in the Venetian chrysobull – "in short, everywhere within [the Emperor's] power."²⁶⁵

An alternative view of the list in the Venetian chrysobull is that it was requested by the Venetians, to guarantee their rights in the listed places, where trade was particularly important to them. Thus the exclusion of Black Sea ports from this list is indicative of a lack of interest in that region. This is certainly

²⁶¹ David Jacoby, 'Italian privileges and Trade in Byzantium before the Fourth Crusade: A Reconsideration', *Anuario de estudios mediavales* 24 (1994), 351.

²⁶² Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204', 685.

²⁶³ M. E. Martin, 'The Venetians in the Byzantine Empire before 1204', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 13 (1988), 209.

²⁶⁴ Jacoby, 'Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204', 679; Balard, *La Romanie Génoise*, 28.

²⁶⁵ "...et simpliciter in omnes partes sub potestate nostre pie mansuetudinis...". *T&T*, vol. 1, 53. Translation mine.

plausible. As noted above, the voyage from Venice or Genoa to the Black Sea is considerable and dangerous. The voyage could take from three months up to half a year.²⁶⁶ Thus, a Venetian or Genoese merchant would need considerable enticement in order to make such a long voyage. In later years, when the Silk Road flowed with full force onto the coasts of the Black Sea, there would be such a temptation; however, during the period under examination, there was only a comparative trickle of eastern commodities, arriving at Trebizond. The bulk of the Silk Road turned south, to the Levant; thus there was only a limited incentive to travel to the Euxine. However, as we have seen, merely that the destination was not on the list, does not mean that the Venetians did not travel there. The exclusion of Euxine ports from the Chrysobull may have indicated a lower degree of interest in the Black Sea by the Venetians, but it does not indicate total disinterest.

A useful point of comparison is the 1204 *Partitio terrarum imperii Romaniae* – the treaty by which the Venetians and Franks sliced and shared the cake that had been the Byzantine Empire after the Fourth Crusade. The Venetians took for themselves “a quarter and half a quarter” of the Empire, accruing such treasures as Crete, Negroponte, and Modon and Coron (“The eyes of the Republic”).²⁶⁷ The *Partitio* was described by Martin as “Venetian ambition at its greatest” – a fair assessment, as they did lay claim to far more land and territory than they could reasonably administer or exploit.²⁶⁸ And yet the Venetians did not seem to take any Pontic ports. The northern coast of Asia Minor (the Byzantine themes of Optimatioi, Boukellarioi and Paphlagonia) was instead given to the Latin Emperor.²⁶⁹ The Emperor would not be able to enjoy the ownership of those lands; divisions on paper and the practicalities of rule are separate issues. However, that the Venetians declined to take ownership, even only prospective, of that Anatolian coastline, or a single port on it, is cited as evidence of a lack of interest in the Black Sea by Venetian merchants. Such disinterest may well be corroborated by the

²⁶⁶ Nystazopolou-Pelekidis, ‘Venice et la Mer Noire’, 37.

²⁶⁷ *T&T*, vol 1, 452-501.

²⁶⁸ Martin, ‘The First Venetians in the Black Sea’, 116.

²⁶⁹ *T&T*, vol 1, 452-501.

instructions provided to Doge Dandolo's ambassadors to Constantinople in 1196-7, which contained no mention of Black Sea ports.²⁷⁰

It does not, however, convey a complete lack of interest in the sea by Venetian merchants; as we have seen, there is evidence from as early as 1206 that the Venetians were taking advantage of their unfettered access to the Sea.²⁷¹ The Venetians, in the *Partitio*, were more interested in control of ports and waterways than rule over territory. Certainly, if the Latin Empire had been able to take control of the northern coastline of Anatolia, the Venetians would have had access and safe harbour there. The decision not to lay claim to a single port – say, for example, Sinope, explicitly taken by the Emperor – is notable, suggesting that the Black Sea was not as important as the Aegean or Adriatic seas, where the Venetians did take ports.²⁷² Nonetheless, it does not preclude the Venetians from having *any* interest in the Black Sea at all.

There may, however, be an exception to this. In the *Partitio*, one Venetian claim is the elusive “Pertinentia Brachioli”, the location of which is not certain.²⁷³ However, Oikonomedes suggests that it may refer to a Black Sea Port, based on comparisons with the 1198 Chrysobull of Alexios III Angelos to the Venetians. The Latin version of the Chrysobull refers to “Brachialum”, which is also found in the *Partitio*, but remains unidentified. Oikonomedes suggests that it is a corruption of Anchialos, near modern Pomorie on the Bulgarian coast.²⁷⁴ In the Greek text of the Chrysobull, “thema Archialou” is mentioned, which does indeed fit with this identification. However, in the *Partitio*, the term used to describe Brachiali is ‘Pertinentia’, equivalent to the Byzantine designation of *episkepsis*.²⁷⁵ The difference between *theme* (province) and *episkepsis* (a much smaller fiscal division) is considerable

²⁷⁰ Jacoby, ‘Byzantium, the Italian Maritime Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204’, 684; M. Pozzi and G. Ravegnani, eds, *I trattati con Bisanzio 1265-1285*, (Venice: *Pacta Veneta* 6, 1995), 116-118 [N°. 10].

²⁷¹ Lilie, *Handel und Politik*, 136-7.

²⁷² *T&T*, vol 1, 476.

²⁷³ *T&T*, vol 1, 467.

²⁷⁴ Michel Balard, ‘Il Mar Nero, Venezia e l’occidente intorno al 1200’, 198-9.

²⁷⁵ *T&T*, vol 1, 467; Antonio Carile, ‘Partitio terrarum Imperii Romaniae’, *Studi Veneziani* 7 (1965): 228.

enough to cause Balard to have some misgivings with this identification, though he nonetheless subscribes to Oikonomedes' interpretation. If Brachiali is the same as Anchialos, then we would indeed have the Venetians first concretely granted access to a Black Sea port (albeit on the Thracian coast) by a Byzantine Emperor. Furthermore, if the identification holds for the *Partitio*, then we would have concrete evidence of the Venetians taking for themselves a Black Sea port in 1204, showing a clear interest in Black Sea trade.

Having dealt with the arguments against Italian interest in the Black Sea, we can now offer up some more positive evidence in favour of their trade in the region. M. E. Martin's contribution²⁷⁶ was a paragraph from the Russian epic, 'The Lay of the Host of Igor':

Now the Germans, now the Venetians,
now the Greeks, and the Moravians
sing glory to Svyatoslav,
but chide Prince Igor
for he let abundance sink
to the bottom of the Kayala
[and] filled up Cuman rivers
with Russian gold.²⁷⁷

Taken as is, this would be evidence of Venetians in Kiev in the late 12th Century; they would certainly have accessed the region via the Black Sea. However, there have been criticisms of Martin's use of this source. On the one hand, there is some dispute on the authenticity of the tale (a criticism which Martin acknowledged), as the only manuscript dates from a much later period; however, since Martin's article

²⁷⁶ Balard traces the use of this text to Vernadsky, but it was Martin that drew scholarly attention to the work for its mention of Venetians.

²⁷⁷ Martin, 'The First Venetians in the Black Sea', 113; Balard, 'Il Mar Nero, Venezia, e l'Occidente intorno al 1200', 198.

was published, the historiography seems to have fallen in favour of the text's genuineness, based on the discovery of bark documents using similar or identical phrases to those in the poem.²⁷⁸ Another criticism, raised by Balard, is whether the term "Venedeski" (Венедици) can unequivocally refer to Venetians, although he offered no alternative reading.²⁷⁹ The third, and currently most substantial criticism, is whether a passage from a poem can accurately represent the Kievan court at the time. Many nationalities are mentioned, clearly with the intent of 'cosmopolitanizing' Kiev; it is difficult to be sure that the text is therefore an accurate representation of the court. However, even if Venetians are only mentioned as an exoticism, this is surely indicative of some knowledge of the Venetians on the part of the Rus', and that the author would expect his audience to be familiar with them. Given, as we have seen, that the Rus' did not travel past Constantinople, this means that contact between the two peoples would have been there, or in the Black Sea. The implication of the *Lay*, however, is that Venetians could believably be found in Rus' territory; whilst they may not have been a regular feature at the Kievan court, they could, nonetheless, have been occasional visitors. Thus the poem, whilst not conclusive, is certainly intriguing.

A new piece of evidence I have uncovered is a small extract in the Chronicle of Novgorod, for the year 1115:

That same year, on April 28, the foreign merchant Voi laid the foundation of a church to St. Theodore of Tyre.²⁸⁰

This might seem an unimportant trivia; however, there was presumably something special about this church for it to have been recorded in the *Chronicle*. After all, in 1019, Kiev was supposed to have had

²⁷⁸ The most up to date discussion of the authenticity of the tale can be found in the 3rd edition of Andrey A. Zaliznyak, *Слово о полку Игореве»: взгляд лингвиста* ['The Tale of Igor's Campaign: A linguistic Perspective'] (Moscow: Рукописные памятники Древней Руси, 2008), which built on the unpublished work of Aleksandr Zimin.

²⁷⁹ Michel Balard, 'Il Mar Nero, Venezia e l'Occidente intorno al 1200', 198.

²⁸⁰ *The Chronicle of Novgorod, 1016-1471*, trans. Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes (London: Royal Historical Society, 1914), 9.

400 churches; by another count, a fire of 1124 destroyed 600 churches in that city.²⁸¹ Quite why Voi's church deserved special notice, one can only speculate. However, for our purposes, Voi's church is interesting because of its patronage. The translation above, belonging to Michell and Forbes, is inaccurate: there is no St. Theodore of Tyre. There is, however, a St. Theodore of Amaseia, also known as Theodore the Recruit – in Greek, 'Theodore Tyron'. The Russian text reads "Федора Тирона"; the name sounds plausible enough, and thus the mistranslation has (as far as I am aware) gone unnoticed until now.²⁸² St. Theodore Tyron was popular in Italy, and nowhere more so than Venice, a city for which he was the original patron; St Mark only became popular in the city after the translation of his relics in 828. The original chapel of the Venetian Doge was dedicated to Theodore, and remained extant until the late 11th century, when it was lost or subsumed during the rebuilding of the Church of St Mark.²⁸³ It is also true Theodore was a popular saint in the Byzantine Empire, having at one stage 15 churches named after him.²⁸⁴

It is plausible, therefore, that this church was set up by either a Byzantine or a Venetian merchant; the Chronicle offers little evidence with which we can corroborate. April 28th does not appear to have any particular relevance as a date; in the Byzantine tradition, Theodore's feast could be celebrated on several days – 17th February, 8th June, first Saturday of Lent (which would have fallen on 13th March that year, Easter being 18th April), and the Saturday of mid-Pentecost (15th May).²⁸⁵ In addition, the feasts of the 'other' Theodore, St. Theodore 'Stratelates' ('the general'), with whom Theodore Tyron is often confused, was to be celebrated on the 7th February and 8th June. Meanwhile, in the Catholic tradition, Theodore 'Tyron' is celebrated on the 9th November.²⁸⁶ None of these dates coincide with

²⁸¹ Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth to the Nineteenth century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press, 1961), 15.

²⁸² 'Chronicle of Novgorod: Russian Text', *Izbornik: History of Ukraine IX-XVIII centuries*, <http://litopys.org.ua/novglet/novg01.htm#r1115>.

²⁸³ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 23-5 & 37.

²⁸⁴ Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saint in Art and Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2016), 50.

²⁸⁵ John Haldon, *A Tale of Two Saints: The Martyrdoms and Miracles of Saints Theodore 'the Recruit' and 'the General'* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 11.

²⁸⁶ Easter date calculated using 'The Easter Date Calculator', <http://www.gmarts.org/index.php?go=413>.

the date given in the Chronicle of Novgorod, which allows us no indication of the merchant's Catholic or Orthodox leanings.²⁸⁷ Similarly, the name, Voi is also unclear, giving no particular indication of its owner's origin. The only potentially helpful fact is that he is referred to as a "foreign merchant". Elsewhere in the Chronicle, Greece and the Greeks are mentioned by name; if Voi were a Greek, he may have been referred to as such. The absence of such an identifier is possibly telling, but hardly anything conclusive.

In sum, there is not enough evidence to clearly demonstrate that Venetians, or other Italians, were trading in the Black Sea prior to the Fourth Crusade. Evidence for their presence is minimal and indirect, not a solid foundation upon which such an argument can be built. However, there are certainly indicators – the Genoese petitions, the documents from after 1204 – that the Genoese, Venetians, and potentially other Mediterranean merchants, had a desire to engage in Black Sea commerce, if only in a limited capacity. Moreover, the arguments for their exclusion, based on either the 1082 chrysobull, or the Rhōsia and Matracha clause of the 12th century, are unconvincing. Thus we are left with circumstantial evidence – the Italians had means, motive and opportunity to engage in Euxine trade. Lacking only is the concrete evidence to 'place them in the room', as it were. My own feeling that such evidence should surely exist, must be placed aside: for the time being, it cannot be said with certainty that any Italian merchant traded in the Black Sea before 1204; nor that they did not trade there. If future evidence is discovered, this debate can be revisited; but for now, the verdict remains: 'not proven'.

²⁸⁷ The text I have explicitly mentions the date as "априля въ 28"; however, Arabic numerals are of course extremely unlikely to have been used in the original text, and the editor offers no comment. Arabic numerals are also used as far back as the 1841 edition, again without comment. Thus it is unclear how the originally mentioned date was written. For this analysis, it is important to note that (whilst numbers are often copied incorrectly or misidentified, especially in systems based upon letters, such as the Cyrillic and Greek systems) the mention of the month April rules out any of the above-mentioned feast dates from being referred to by the text. It is, of course possible – but less likely – that 'April' was itself a mistake in the text, but that requires detailed examination of manuscripts by an expert, and the publication of a more critical edition than that to which I currently have access. 'Chronicle of Novgorod: Russian Text', *Izbornik: History of Ukraine IX-XVIII centuries; Полное собрание русских летописей*, [Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles], vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Edward Prats, 1841), 123 & 213

3. The Constantinopolitan Black Sea:

Grain Trade in the Euxine

Having explored the Black Sea's connection with Mediterranean politics, we now turn to exploring the trade patterns both within the sea and beyond its hinterlands.

i. Introduction: Separating the Wheat from the Chaff

It is both necessary and desirable to treat the trade in grain separately from the other, less essential commodities for several reasons. First, unlike many of the commodities discussed in the next chapter of this thesis, which deals with luxuries, grain is entirely fungible, and thus subject to different trade patterns from the other unique and non-interchangeable goods. Secondly, grain is an essential commodity, forming part of the everyday life of the inhabitants of the Black Sea of all classes and almost all cultures; in this respect it differs greatly from other Black Sea goods, especially those luxuries brought along the silk roads. Moreover, by examining the Euxine grain trade, we will be able to explore the various intra-Euxine trade routes and connections from a more local or regional perspective, rather than the further-flung travels of the other chapters.

Grain comes with its own difficulties for the historian. Most grain is eaten, and leaves no trace; and that which is 'misaid' (for upon such mislaying is archaeology dependent), is perishable. Therefore the historian of cereals suffers from a lack of physical and archaeological evidence. Moreover, the banality of grain as quite literally an every-day commodity leads to it being ignored in written sources – except when supplies run out.²⁸⁸ As a result, much of the history of the cereals in the Black Sea is by necessity based on supposition and inference. Nonetheless, by rising to the challenges posed by this

²⁸⁸ Indeed, Attaleiates notes that in such cases, grain becomes the focus of everything, for 'dearth of grain causes dearth in everything else, as it is grain that allows the purchase or preparation of other goods, while those who work for wages demand higher pay to compensate for the scarcity of food.' Attaleiates, *The History*, trans. Anthony Kaldellis and Dimitris Krallis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 363-373.

scarce source material, we can gain an insight, however tentative, into the patterns of the Euxine grain trade.

The defining aspect of the 11th and 12th century agricultural life of the Black Sea region was the arrival of the Seljuqs, whose raids and conquests covered the southern Caucasus and the vast majority of Asia Minor. Their arrival devastated the cereal growth of Georgia and Byzantine Anatolia, as is demonstrated by both the literary and archaeological data. This was further exacerbated by a minor climatic shift, causing less favourable growing conditions.²⁸⁹ Byzantium, having lost a significant portion of its agricultural heartland, was forced to look elsewhere for provisions of grain to feed its hungry populace.

The first likely supplier which we will examine is the Kievan Rus', Byzantium's long-standing northern trade partner. However, although the Rus' dwelt on fertile land, of which they made great use, they do not appear to have responded to the growing demand for grain from the southern reaches of the Black Sea. Historiographical claims to the contrary, suggesting that Rus' provided grain to Constantinople, appear unfounded. It is possible that this trade was conducted by Chersonite middlemen; however, the evidential basis for this is questionable.

An alternative Euxine supply which we will consider is Georgia. Although she, too, had suffered at the arrival of the Seljuqs, she managed to recover through large-scale state intervention, resulting in a resurgent agriculturally-based economy. However, references to Georgian grain in Byzantium are non-existent. It is possible, however, that this grain nonetheless reached Constantinople; its absence from the literary record can be explained by examining the route that this grain travelled in order to get to Byzantium, which obscured its links to its Georgian origins.

²⁸⁹ John Haldon et al., 'The Climate and Environment of Byzantine Anatolia: Integrating Science, History and Archaeology', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 45 (2014), 124-5. For a detailed discussion of climatic trends in the turn-of-the-millennium, see Ronnie Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

ii. Cereal Killers: Constantinople's Grain Supply and the Seljuqs

It is tempting to take the desire for grain in one of Europe's greatest metropolitan areas as axiomatic, but it is worth considering why the grain supply of the Byzantine Empire during this period was so potentially unstable. By 1200, the population of Constantinople was at a peak, making it one of the largest cities in Europe. Criticizing Villehardouin's estimate of 400,000 inhabitants as "no doubt inaccurate", Magdalino nonetheless accepts it as a good starting point.²⁹⁰ He suggests that that Constantinople's population was at a similar level to the start of 6th century, before the Plague of Justinian wrought terrible death upon its populace. If we accept Teall's estimate of approximately 500,000 inhabitants at that time, then, following Magdalino's correlation, this would suggest Villehardouin had underestimated, rather than overestimated, the population of Constantinople.²⁹¹ By contrast, Koder opts for much less sizeable population, suggesting that 160,000 inhabitants "is perhaps nearer to the truth", and potentially a number even as low as 50,000 inhabitants could be realistic. I find such Koder's numbers too low, and believe Magdalino's estimate likely closer to the truth; however, given that the difference between these estimates is up to a whole order of magnitude, the difficulty in reliably assessing medieval populations is clear. What is important to note is that "even [such] a number [as Koder's own lower estimates]... would signal that – under medieval conditions – we are concerned with a megalopolis... which was not able to survive from its hinterland alone... without a supply system."²⁹²

In either event, Constantinople was a crowded and (over)populous urban centre during our period – something which would become exacerbated by an influx of migrants due to Seljuq invasions. However, an important difference between the metropolis of the 6th century and that of the 11th-12th

²⁹⁰ Geoffrey de Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, 251; Paul Magdalino, 'The Grain Supply of Constantinople, ninth-twelfth centuries', in *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (London: Variorum 1995), 35.

²⁹¹ Teall, 'The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire', 92.

²⁹² J. Koder, 'Maritime trade and the food supply for Constantinople in the middle ages', in *Travel in the Byzantine World*, ed. Ruth Macrides (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 110.

centuries is that, in the 6th century, Constantinople could be supplied with an abundance of grain sourced from the agriculturally productive regions of Egypt and Sicily. However, these two regions had been lost to Arab invasions, at the beginnings of the 7th and 10th centuries respectively. This proved a significant loss to the Byzantine agricultural economy. As a result, Constantinople was forced to supply its populace from elsewhere. Nor was Constantinople the only locale which depended upon Anatolian grain for its supply. When Italian-Turkish trade was interrupted in the mid 1300s, the resulting dearth of grain even caused a famine upon the largely-fertile island of Crete.²⁹³

The Byzantine Empire had several internal sources of supply, though none of these could compare with the excellent agricultural output of Egypt and Sicily. It must at this point be noted that the Byzantine agricultural milieu was dominated by subsistence farming. Most farmers were small-scale landowners, whose priority in farming was to grow enough food to sustain them and their dependents. Only after having achieved this goal, would they consider selling any excess provender in markets.²⁹⁴ Some farmers would not have had enough land to achieve the first milestone of self-sufficiency, and would be obliged to engage in additional gardening of legumes and similar smaller crops to sell at local urban centres.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, farmers in less fertile regions tended to focus on 'lower-quality' crops, as, though the price was lower, the crop-yields tended to be more consistent.²⁹⁶ Even for the larger landholdings for which we have data, wheat only accounted for approximately half of the crops grown.²⁹⁷ Thus, for the vast majority of Byzantine farmers, particularly peasants and those in less-fertile areas, export of cereal crops for urban markets beyond the local vicinity was simply not

²⁹³ Mike Carr, *Merchant Crusaders in the Aegean, 1291-1352* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 128-9.

²⁹⁴ Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 121. For a reader wishing to know more about the technological nuances of Byzantine agriculture, Harvey's chapter on this subject (120-162) can be recommended.

²⁹⁵ Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire*, 138.

²⁹⁶ Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire*, 126.

²⁹⁷ Harvey provides details of the property of one Xeropotamou in the 1270s, where wheat represented approximately 40% of the recently-sown crops, and of the estate of Baris which, in 1073 had stores consisting of approximately 60% wheat. Obviously, it is statistically illiterate to draw strong conclusions from only a couple of data points two centuries removed from each other, but it nonetheless provides an inkling (if only an inkling) of the crop-diversity on some larger estates. Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire*, 126.

a consideration. Instead, for consistent export of wheat and similar grains, a combination of productive soil and extensive landholdings was necessary. However, Harvey notes that in proximity to towns, where there was a greater demand for wheat, these requirements could be waived; it stands to reason that this was also the case where the farms were further from urban centres, but there were consistent commercial links to those towns through existing trade patterns – on condition that the farmers could provide for their households first.²⁹⁸

A further nuance of the the grain trade which must be considered, was the fact that not all grain is created equal. Both Byzantine and non-Byzantine sources indicate a hierarchy of grain, which had both economic and social ramifications. Pegolotti, writer of a handbook for Italian merchants in the Black Sea in the early 14th century, ranked the wheat available in the Black Sea, placing high value on that in Caffa and the north-western reaches of the Euxine, but that in the south and south-west, including Sinope, is of worse quality.²⁹⁹ However, Pegolotti does not go into detail regarding this quality. More details can be found in the poetry of Ptochoprodromos, where bread is ranked, not by location of its grain, but by the quality of the grains. Particularly, “foul bread” is compared to the good-quality white loaves enjoyed by abbots, although there are many intervening classes of bread, some of which are named in the poem.³⁰⁰ What is notable here, if perhaps a trifle obvious, is the ubiquity of bread. It is not the eating of bread itself that indicates social or financial standing, but the *type* of bread. This serves to underline what we perhaps already knew – that everyone, rich or poor, depended upon their daily bread for survival. Importing large quantities of grain, therefore, were necessary for the survival of the cities around the Euxine, and Constantinople most of all.

With these prerequisites in mind, we can investigate potential supplies of wheat for Constantinople. Probably the most dependable source of grain was Thrace, which, given its proximity to

²⁹⁸ Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire*, 126.

²⁹⁹ Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. Evans, 42.

³⁰⁰ Ptochoprodromos, Poem III l.145-157, and Poem IV l.399, in *Ptochoprodromos: Einführung, kritische Ausgabe, deutsche Übersetzung, Glossar*, ed. and trans. H. Eideneier (Cologne: Romiosini, 1991), 124 & 160-1.

Constantinople and the relative ease of its defence, was a natural reserve for the Empire. It had previously been used as a supplement to the fertile Mediterranean granaries, now lost. Its use during the 12th century is attested by Michael Choniates, brother of the chronicler Niketas, who wrote scathingly against the ungrateful elite of the imperial capital in the late 12th century: “Are not the grain-bearing fields of Macedonia and Thrace and Thessaly farmed for your benefit?”³⁰¹ However, there were two significant difficulties with the dependence upon Thrace for Constantinopolitan grain. Firstly, Thrace constituted the Empire’s northern border, and thus was subject to the possibility of hostile incursions: both Turkic nomads from the Pontic-Caspian Steppe, and the more local Bulgars, posed a significant threat.³⁰² During the misrule of Alexios III Angelos, such threats became real, and Thrace was plundered by Hungarians, Vlachs and Bulgars. Such threats were not necessarily purely external, either: the rebellion of a certain Nestor, recorded by Attaleiates, concluded as follows:

Nestor returned [from Macedonia] to his lands and estates in the Danube area... his precipitous departure brought relief to the situation, as those who were entrusted with the task could now without fear import to the capital agricultural produce and other foods.³⁰³

A second, and more simple, problem was the matter of sufficiency. Constantinople was as populous as it had ever been, and Thrace had previously only been an auxiliary, not primary, supply for the Empire. It was difficult, and ill-advised, to rely upon it for the daily bread of Constantinople.³⁰⁴ Similar problems are associated with the Aegean territories - Thessaly and the islands of that sea. Grain could

³⁰¹ Michael Choniates, *Epistulae*, 69-70; translation by Magdalino, ‘The Grain Supply of Constantinople’, 36.

³⁰² John Haldon, ‘Some thoughts on Climate Change, Local Environment and Grain Production in Byzantine Northern Anatolia’, *Late Antique Archaeology* 12 (2018), 21.

³⁰³ Attaleiates, *The History*, 381-3.

³⁰⁴ On a related, but less critical note, it is worth considering that when Constantinople was under siege, it could be supplied with grain by sea much more easily than by land; this perhaps gives a leaning towards regions where the infrastructure was already focussed on maritime export, rather than overland, such as from Thrace.

be sourced from them, especially in emergencies, but whether they could provide enough to reliably supply the Megalopolis is another matter.³⁰⁵

A third source of supply was Anatolia, described, fairly, by Teall as the “heartland” of the Empire.³⁰⁶

The vast majority of its provinces were very fertile. Haldon notes that Paphlagonia and Pontus, as early as the 9th century, had become major suppliers of the Constantinopolitan populace, and that the centre and western portions of Anatolia had the necessary fertility to provide additional provisions.³⁰⁷

Theophanes records that, after the Arab siege of Constantinople had been beaten back in 717, ships immediately set off to gather grain from the fields of Bithynia.³⁰⁸ Similarly, during the rebellion of Bardas Phokas in 987-8, Constantinople sought grain supplies from the Black Sea coastline of Anatolia, as far as Trebizond.³⁰⁹

Paphlagonia provided essential grain supplies for Cherson in the 10th Century, according to Porphyrogennetos, “without which [the Chersonites] cannot live”.³¹⁰ That region also provided annual grain shipments to Constantinople in the 9th century; ships from the Paphlagonian island of Androte were caught having defrauded the Emperor of some of his allotted grain.³¹¹ Even the less happy regions of Anatolia could provide. An 11th century bishop described the region south of Sinope thus: “very desolate, uninhabited, unpleasant and without trees, vegetation, woods or shade, a total wilderness full of neglect... it abounds, however, in the production of grain.”³¹²

³⁰⁵ Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean*, 150.

³⁰⁶ Teall, ‘The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire’, 112-3.

³⁰⁷ Haldon, ‘Some thoughts on Climate Change’, 21.

³⁰⁸ Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 546.

³⁰⁹ Jan Olof Rosenqvist, *The Hagiographical Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond in Codex Athous Dionysiou 154: A critical edition with introduction, translation, commentary and Indexes* (Acta Universitatis Upsalensis, Uppsala, 1996), 101-112; Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 97.

³¹⁰ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 286-7.

³¹¹ John F. Haldon, *The Empire That Would Not Die: The paradox of Eastern Roman Survival, 640-740* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 241. The island of Androte is not surely located; Haldon places it off the Black Sea coastline, near Paphlagonia; however, Gedeon believes it to be the modern island of Ekinlik in the Sea of Marmara. Cyril Mango, ‘Observations on the Correspondence of Ignatius, Metropolitan of Nicaea (first half of the ninth Century)’, *Texte und Untersuchungen* 125 (1976), 408.

³¹² Haldon, *The Empire That Would Not Die*, 243.

Unfortunately, however, the 11th century would see this Byzantine heartland coming under sustained and substantial pressure from a new enemy. The date of the arrival of the Seljuqs in Byzantine Anatolia is not easy to pinpoint precisely. The fluid political nature of the various migrating Turkic tribes makes it difficult to be precise as to when the first 'Seljuq' took up arms against the Empire. Indeed, the label 'Seljuq' itself is arguably inaccurate; depicting the conglomeration of tribes and kinship groups under one heading suggests a coherence of action, intent and motivation that was not always present.³¹³ Attaleiates noted that, when the Byzantines attempted to negotiate with the Seljuq Sultan in the early years of the conflict, the Sultan professed not to know the identity of "these plunderers, who, like wild wolves, were making the raids."³¹⁴ This may have been a simple negotiating tactic, but given the decentralised structure of the Seljuq system, there is no particular reason to assume that it was also a deceit on the Sultan's part. In any event, by 1048, with the battle of Kapetron, the Byzantines had gone to war with the body of the Seljuq polity, and the Byzantine-Seljuq conflict had certainly begun in earnest; the wars would continue into the 13th century.³¹⁵

It was not an entirely one-sided conflict; the Byzantines also had their successes. However, the Seljuqs succeeded in stripping Byzantium of the vast majority of the Anatolian peninsula, and they did so at pace. By 1067, Seljuq raiders reached as far as Caesarea, approximately central to Anatolia. In 1078, land between Nicaea and the Sea of Marmara was under Seljuq control. In 1084, the Seljuqs even captured Smyrna, on the Aegean coast itself. Whilst Anatolia was never wholly under Seljuq control – a notable Byzantine holdout was the city of Nikomedeia – the Seljuqs nonetheless managed to control the bulk of the peninsula, confining Byzantine control to a few small exclaves of the coastline.³¹⁶

³¹³ Alexander Daniel Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia, ca. 1040-1130* (London: Routledge, 2017), 4.

³¹⁴ Attaleiates, *The History*, 81.

³¹⁵ Aziz Bařan, *The Great Seljuqs: A History* (London: Routledge, 2010), 22-4; D. A. Korobeinikov, 'Raiders and Neighbours: The Turks (1040-1304)', in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500-1492*, ed. J. Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 698-99.

³¹⁶ Attaleiates, *The History*, 490-1.

Byzantine accounts of the Seljuq attacks on the imperial lands paint a grim picture. Attaleiates states that when Constantine X Doukas ascended the throne in 1059, scarcely a decade after Kapetron, “the east [beyond Galatia, Honorias and Phrygia] was entirely plundered and destroyed”; the 1067 raid on Caesarea consisted of “pillaging and destroying everything and setting it all on fire”. During the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes, Attaleiates discusses “the campaigns of the Turks... their slaughter of so many Christians, the devastation of villages and land, and the total turmoil visibly prevailing in the east, with countless people being slaughtered or captured”.³¹⁷ So too says Nikephoros Bryennios, who records that after Diogenes’ capture, the attacks of the Seljuqs devastated the villages as they “pillaged and ravaged all of the east”.³¹⁸

An important distinction between the attacks of the Seljuqs and other invasions (say, for example, the Arab attacks of the previous centuries) is that the Seljuqs were not seeking simply to expand their borders and bring the existing population under their control. Usually, such invasions would lead only to short-lived economic contractions – populations not of the same religion as their new rulers would pay head taxes or accept conversion (nominal or actual); expelled populations often returned shortly afterwards, or were replaced swiftly by newcomers.³¹⁹ However, Seljuq occupation was more than simply regime change – it was environmental change. The Seljuqs were nomads; they did not seek grain for their people, but grazing for their horses and pasture for their livestock. As a result, they had no interest in preserving the agricultural infrastructure or viability of the lands they attacked. The complete disinterest of the Seljuqs in grain is demonstrated by Attaleiates’ account of the Byzantine recapture of the Syrian city of Hierapolis; within the city the Byzantine army found no items of value

³¹⁷ Attaleiates, *The History*, 142-3, 168-9, 360-3.

³¹⁸ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Histoire*, ed. and trans. Paul Gautier (Brussels: Byzantion, 1975), 144-7.

³¹⁹ Catherine Holmes, “How the East was won’ during the reign of Basil II”, in *Eastern Approaches to Byzantium*, edited by Anthony Eastmond (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2001), 43-4.

whatsoever, for they have all been stolen. All that remained, was a copious amount of untouched wheat.³²⁰

As a result of such disdain for arable activities, the impact of a Seljuq attack upon local agriculture could be devastating. A vivid description of the aftermath of a Seljuq attack comes from the will of one Eustathios Boilas, who was granted estates in eastern Asia Minor shortly after the initial waves of Turkic invasion (c.1050s). The precise location of these estates is unclear, but it may even have included Kapetron itself, where the Seljuqs had only recently defeated the Byzantine armies in a pitched battle. Certainly the estates were on one of the primary raiding routes of the Seljuqs. The land Boilas received was “foul and unmanageable... filled with snakes, scorpions and wild beasts”; half of his new property was “deserted and uninhabited”. This devastation was due in no small part to the Seljuq raiding parties. Only through huge investments of money, time and effort did he manage to make his new estates productive; however, his death without children led to the breakup of his lands, with three estates distributed to destitute orphans. As a result, it seems unlikely that future owners of the Boilas estates would have been able to re-invest in the lands to the same extent the next time Seljuqs attacked.³²¹ A similar story is told in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the state histories of Georgia, which record that during the ‘Didi Turkoba’ or ‘Great Turkish Troubles’, “there was neither sowing nor harvest. The land was ruined and turned into forest; in the place of men, beasts and animals of the field made their dwelling there.”³²²

It would be naïve not to possess some level of scepticism towards the degree of devastation described in these sources. For one thing, we know that, at times, the Byzantines and Seljuqs could achieve a

³²⁰ Attaleiates, *The History*, 199-201.

³²¹ Speros Vyronis, Jr., ‘The Will of a Provincial Magnate, Eustathius Boilas (1059)’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 11 (1957), 265, 275, 276-7. Whilst the will does not directly attribute the devastation of the region to the Seljuqs, Vyronis’ analysis of the place-names mentioned suggests that Boilas’ estate was directly in the path of the Seljuq advance.

³²² Robert W. Thomson, trans., *Rewriting Caucasian History: The medieval Armenian Adaptions of the Georgian Chronicles. The Original Georgian Texts and The Armenian Adaption* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 311; ‘The Life of David, King of Kings’, 172. Roin Metreveli, *The Golden Age: Georgia from the 11th Century to the First quarter of the 13th Century* (Tbilisi: Artanuji, 2010), 34.

“symbiotic” relationship on the border regions, such as when in 1161, with Imperial consent, the Seljuqs would winter in Byzantine territory before leaving again in the summer.³²³ Thus we must remember that even the most unbiased sources can be inaccurate, and a historian must view all evidence with a critical eye. However, we are in a fairly unique and fortunate position to corroborate these sources with more objective, even scientific evidence. The volcanic lake Nar, approximately 75 miles west of Caesarea, creates a new layer of sediment each year; preserved in this sediment are, among other things, the pollen grains from the surrounding area, at both a local and regional (c.25 mile radius) level.³²⁴

This palynological record has been analysed by Haldon *et al.*, and provides a fascinating window into the environmental history of the region. Cappadocia appears to have been at its most agriculturally productive in the 10th and early 11th century; rye pollen in particular reaches a peak abundance during the mid-11th centuries. However, shortly thereafter there is a rapid decline, with rye grains dropping from c.10% of all pollen to less than 5% by 1100, and even disappearing entirely by the mid-12th century. Wheat, though less common, shows a similar pattern, with no wheat pollen found from c. 1050-1200.³²⁵ Lake Nar is not the only such palaeoenvironmental source; however, it is by far the most detailed and easy to use. Golhisar, in the south-western Anatolia, although it only offers a less precise palynological record, records a similar pattern; a local maximum of cereal grains declines sharply in the late 11th century.³²⁶

³²³ Odo of Deuil records that though the Turks had much of Anatolia, “where the Greeks still hold castles, the two peoples divide the revenues [*redditus*]”. However, the phrasing leaves it quite unclear as to whether this is done through mutual agreement, or simply application of power. In my personal opinion, the context suggests the latter, but it is a matter of interpretation. Odo of Deuil, *De Profectione Ludovici VIII in Orientem*, trans. V. G. Berry (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1948), 89; Joannes Preiser-Kapeller, ‘A collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean?’ 212.

³²⁴ Ann England *et al.*, ‘Historical landscape change in Cappadocia (central Turkey): a palaeoecological investigation of annually laminated sediments from Nar lake’, *The Holocene* 18.8 (2008), 1238.

³²⁵ England *et al.*, ‘Historical landscape change in Cappadocia’, 1236-7 (fig 4) & 1243.

³²⁶ Haldon *et al.*, ‘The Climate and Environment of Byzantine Anatolia’, 147-8.

Both the Nar and Golhisar records show a decline in cereal growth in the area “concomitant” with the arrival of the Seljuqs in their respective regions.³²⁷ However, Haldon *et al* do point out that this is not necessarily conclusive proof that Turkish attacks were wholly responsible for the decline, which instead probably “reflects a complex interaction of natural factors [such as environmental changes] with anthropogenic ones”.³²⁸ Similarly, Preiser-Kapeller notes that “the mere presence of Turkmen groups is not sufficient to explain a long-term decline of agricultural activity”, which is attributable instead to “combinations of environmental, socio-economic and political forces”.³²⁹ Ellenblum posits the thesis that the eastern Mediterranean region suffered a climactic collapse during this period. This thesis has two main underpinnings. The first – that severe and repeated cold spells in central Asia drove formerly peaceful nomadic tribes – the Pechenegs, Seljuqs, Uzes and others – south- and westward, where they wrought havoc in the settled empires – is certainly convincing. One may take issue with the suggestion that these nomadic tribes were “formerly peaceful”; the Rus’ and Byzantines had long been in conflict against the Pechenegs. However, the basic premise of climactic shifts encouraging demographic movements seems largely accurate, though mostly falls outside the remit of this thesis.³³⁰ In any event, it is reassuring to note that the scientific and historical records coincide on the matter of a significant decline in Anatolian grain production in the 11th and 12th centuries.

The second underpinning of Ellenblum’s thesis is that the collapse of the eastern Mediterranean region can be attributed to a series of disastrous weather events across the region the late 10th to early 11th centuries, ironically largely contemporary with the ‘Medieval optimum’ in Western Europe. This seems less accurate with regard to Anatolia. Ellenblum uses the Nile region as an indicator for the general agricultural health of the eastern Mediterranean, as it was so often used as the granary of the region; in addition, there is accurate yearly data for the Nile floodplains, due to the annual measuring

³²⁷ Haldon et al., ‘The Climate and Environment of Byzantine Anatolia’, 151.

³²⁸ Haldon et al., ‘The Climate and Environment of Byzantine Anatolia’, 151.

³²⁹ Preiser-Kapeller, ‘A Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean?’, 212.

³³⁰ Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean*, 125.

of its 'plenitude'. During the period 300-900 AD, the Nile region suffered 9 famines, lasting a total of 11 years – 1 drought year every 54 years of abundance. By contrast, the period 950-1072 saw 9 famine events of a total of 26 years: more than one year of drought for every 5 years of abundance. The final two decades of that period saw 11 years of drought: a 1:1 ratio.³³¹

There are two problems with such a thesis. Firstly, as with all grand monocausal historiographical theories, it tends not to account for the complexity of other variables; secondly, Ellenblum's thesis is based mostly on written sources, but ignores the palaeoarchaeological data. When the data-sets are used in concert, the picture becomes more complex. Thonemann noted that "neither written nor archaeological nor natural scientific evidence allows us to speak of a general "collapse"... on the contrary, we encounter high regional variations... where evidence indicates a significant agricultural decline, climate-induced stress can be identified as a significant, but not as a sufficient, cause of these developments."³³² The criticism that Ellenblum did not use the 'archives of nature' carries additional weight for his chapter on Byzantine Anatolia.³³³ For example, in the Nar Golu pollen data, the sudden collapse in cereal pollen is datable to 1100; prior to that, there is a localised maximum: about 50 years where cereal pollen is at its most abundant.³³⁴ This contradicts Ellenblum's suggestion of a continual, intensifying decline throughout the 11th century. Moreover, there is written evidence that Byzantium was, at least as late as 1054, unaffected by this agricultural collapse, as the Empire offered to help deal with the shortages in Egypt by supplying the region with grain; Zonaras' report of above-average harvests is corroborated by speleothem data from Sofular in northwestern Anatolia.³³⁵ It is true that

³³¹ Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean*, 28-9.

³³² Peter Thonemann, *The Maeander Valley: A Historical Geography from Antiquity to Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 216.

³³³ Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, 'A collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean? New results and theories on the interplay between climate and societies in Byzantium and the Near East, ca. 1000-1200 AD', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 65 (2015), 200-1.

³³⁴ England *et al.*, 'Historical landscape change in Cappadocia', 1237.

³³⁵ Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, ed. Theodoros Büttner-Wobst (Bonn: *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, 1897), 652; David Jacoby, 'Byzantine Trade with Egypt from the Mid-Tenth Century to the Fourth Crusade', *Thesaurismata* 30 (2000), 46; Preiser-Kapeller, 'A collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean?' 208-9.

Ellenblum does place much of the region of Asia Minor in the 'second circle' of domino effects, and the Nar Golu lake could, conceivably, be in that circle, which he argues was not directly affected by the climactic shifts.³³⁶ However, if we do accept that the lake was outside the directly affected area, then that would attribute most of the agricultural damage to the marauding Seljuqs anyway, even if viewed simply as 'agents of the climate variation'. Thus it seems, even if we do accept the bulk of Ellenblum's thesis of Mediterranean collapse, we are nonetheless obliged to accept that the Anatolian sufferings were largely, if not entirely, nomadic rather than meteorological in form.

In the event either of climactic alterations, or of purely nomadic assaults, it is clear that Anatolia's role as granary of the Empire was severely undermined. It is difficult to assess how important was this loss to the grain supply of Byzantium, and in particular Constantinople. As we have seen, Anatolia was a fertile and useful agricultural resource; its loss cannot have been easy for the Byzantine Empire to bear. A few coastal exclaves of agricultural importance, such as parts of the Pontus, for example, remained – whether by chance or dogged strategical devotion – under Byzantine control 'for the duration'; however, they were small and even their extraordinary fertility could hardly make up for the loss of such a vast amount of unexceptional but dependable agricultural space. However, the loss of Anatolia had a compound effect for Constantinople: not only did the Empire lose large tracts of agricultural land, but the city's demand for grain also skyrocketed in tandem with that loss, due to the influx of refugees to the capital. The first indication of a significant quantity of refugees in Constantinople comes from 1044, when the influx of "aliens, Armenians, Arabs and Jews" is held responsible for a severe riot; as a result, all newcomers to the city from the past 30 years were expelled by order of Constantine IX Monomachos. Whilst not explicitly identified as refugees, the geographical origins of the three named ethnic groups indicates the Seljuq-caused disorders in Syria and Anatolia as a source for these alien populations.³³⁷ Later, Attaleiates records that "because the east was being

³³⁶ Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean*, 38.

³³⁷ Gregory Abû'l-Faraj, *The Chronography of Bar Hebraeus*, translated by Ernest A. Wallis Budge (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1932), Vol I., 203; D. Jacoby, 'The Jews of Constantinople and their demographic hinterland', in

wasted by the barbarians there who were ruining and subjected it, large multitudes were fleeing those regions on a daily basis and seeking refuge in the Imperial City, so that hunger afflicted everyone, oppressing them because of a lack of supplies".³³⁸ It was perhaps this increase in demand that led to the fall of the *logothete* Nikephoritzes, when his attempts to regulate and centralise the grain supply in Rhaidestos led to hunger in the capital, and eventually outright revolt in 1077.³³⁹

In summary, therefore, Constantinople's grain supply in the 11th and early 12th centuries was a fragile entity indeed. The loss of Anatolian regions had not only cost the empire dearly-needed farmlands, but also brought thousands of hungry, homeless exiles to Constantinople, seeking succour and satiation within its walls. The alternative domestic supplies of grain – Thrace, Thessaly and the Aegean islands – had their own problems of inadequate resources and vulnerability to attack. Thus the Byzantines were wise to diversify their cereal intake, and look beyond the imperial borders for alternative suppliers. The Black Sea, having fertile hinterlands and friendly Christian nations along its coastline, held excellent prospects for such investigations. There were two likely candidates to provide Euxine grain: The Kievan Rus', and the Kingdom of Georgia. We shall look at each of these in turn.

iii. From Russia With Lunch: Kievan Agriculture and Exports

First we shall examine the Kievan Rus'. Despite their surplus of grain, they do not appear to have exported it to Byzantium, even though they had existing and strong trade links with Constantinople. The most likely cause for this were the complications in transporting grain safely down the dangerous river route they took. It is possible, however, that an alternative, overland route was used by Byzantine

Constantinople and its hinterland: Papers from the Twenty-seventh Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Oxford, April 1993, ed. Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (London: Variorum, 1995), 223-4.

³³⁸ Attaleiates, *The History*, 385; David Jacoby, 'Byzantine Maritime Trade, 1015-1118', *Travaux et Mémoires* 21.2 (2017), 629.

³³⁹ Attaleiates, *The History*, 363.

merchants to transport grain from the Kievan realm to the city of Cherson, whence it would be exported overseas; however, the evidence for such a proposition is limited.

The Kievan Rus' realm sat upon the Chernozem Belt, also called the Black Earth Region. Chernozem is an exceptionally fertile type of soil, with a distinctive dark colour, lending itself to high agricultural yields. There are only two regions in the world where it can commonly be found: a stretch of the North American plains, between Manitoba in Canada and Kansas in the American Midwest; and a long swathe across Eurasia, with its strongest section being the north of the Black Sea, and the Pontic Steppe: for our purposes, we can define the 'Chernozem Belt' as the land north of the Black Sea as far as Kiev, from the Danube to the Ural, including Ciscaucasia.³⁴⁰

The fertility of this region has long been known, and it has filled the breadbaskets of many empires, from the ancient Athenians to the more modern USSR.³⁴¹ Indeed, the fertility of this region is still highly valued today. The Ukrainian government attempted to ban sale and export of its valuable soil; however, the black market in Chernozem exports prior to the Russian invasion of 2014 was valued at almost a billion dollars.³⁴²

Naturally, the Byzantine Empire, with its capital so closely situated to this fertile land, made use of the region. In the fifth century, Socrates of Constantinople noted that the Black Sea provided the "multitudinous" population of the capital with grain "to any extent they may require."³⁴³ It appears

³⁴⁰ For a fuller depiction of the Chernozem Belt, see Fig 1. from N. C. Field 'Environmental Quality and Land Productivity: A Comparison of the Agricultural Land Base of the USSR and North America', *Canadian Geographer* 12 (1968), 1-14. The image is available here: <https://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/images/map.wheat.zones.RUS-Hindus.Great88.jpg>.

Chernozem soils can also be found in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Croatia; however, they are not as abundant or ubiquitous in the same way, and thus do not benefit their inhabitants to the same extent as does the North Black Sea region.

³⁴¹ Peter V. Jones, ed, *The World of Athens: An introduction to classical Athenian culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 230-231; Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 357ff; Christopher I. Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 268-9.

³⁴² Leo Kraznozhon, 'Black Market for Rich Black Earth', *Kyiv Post*, published 9 November 2011. <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/opinion/op-ed/black-market-for-rich-black-earth-116610.html>.

³⁴³ Socrates of Constantinople, 'Historia Ecclesiastica' in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 67 (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1881), 501.

that Socrates was referring to the plains of the Chernozem Belt, as Transcaucasian coast was still largely undeveloped at this time – indeed, Procopius would describe it as “a land lacking in all good things”, and mention the establishment of a monopoly on the import of bread to the Lazi-Colchis region.³⁴⁴ Similarly, in the 13 and 14th centuries, Constantinople would become utterly dependent on the import of grain from the Black Sea, carried by the Genoese and Venetians, who would withhold the grain for political and diplomatic advantage.³⁴⁵ This grain would not all have been from the Chernozem Belt; some, certainly would have been from the western coast – modern Romania and Bulgaria. However, Pegolotti’s famous handbook for Black Sea merchants rates the grain from various regions; he comments on the (comparatively) poor quality of grain from the Bulgarian coastline, compared with Caffa and its environs (i.e. the Chernozem Belt) which he praises as the best grain in the Black Sea. Thus we can be sure that the Genoese grain trade on which Byzantium depended was sourced partially (if not primarily) from the Chernozem belt.³⁴⁶

Previously, inhabitants of the Chernozem Belt had not been particularly agrarian. The Huns, who dominated the Chernozem Belt until the 5th century, had no interest in farming; Ammianus stated that “none of them ploughs, or even touches a plough-handle”.³⁴⁷ It was similar for the other nomadic peoples of the Steppe who followed them, the Avars (6th-8th) and early Bulgars (7th).³⁴⁸ Any grain these peoples did have, was looted or extracted from subject peoples, such as the Slavs.³⁴⁹ The same appears to have been largely true of the Qipjaqs, who arrived in the western steppe around the turn of the

³⁴⁴ Teall, ‘The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire’ 135-6; he is referring to Procopius, *De Bellis*, Book 2 chapter 25. See Procopius, *History of the Wars*, 386-9.

³⁴⁵ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, 264; Chrysostomides, ‘Venetian commercial privileges under the Palaeologi’, 267 & 317.; for a specific example, see: Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantinae Historiae*, ed. Ludwig Schopen (Bonn: *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, 1829-55), Vol II, 766-7. In part this situation was caused by logistical vulnerabilities caused by Byzantium’s inability to control its own grain supply; however, the importance of grain imports, from the Black Sea no less, to the survival of Constantinople, is nonetheless apparent.

³⁴⁶ Michel Balard, ‘Gênes et la Mer Noire (XIIIe-XVe siècles)’ *Revue Historique* 270 (1983), 42; Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. Evans, 42.

³⁴⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, trans. C. D. Yonge (London: Bohn, 1862), 579 [31.2.10.].

³⁴⁸ J Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in their History and Culture* (London: University of California Press, 1973), 174.

³⁴⁹ Teall, ‘The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire’, 117.

millennium.³⁵⁰ Both Otto of Freising and Robert of Clari reported an absence of agriculture in their lands.³⁵¹ Similar too is the account of Rabbi Petachia, who claims that the Qipjaqs did not eat bread but mentions that he did observe some cultivated land, and that the inhabitants cooked barley and millet, testifying to some limited agriculture, if not by the Qipjaqs themselves, then by some subject tribe. However, it was certainly not to the extent that they had excess produce to sell.³⁵²

However, the other inhabitants of the Chernozem belt at this time, the Kievan Rus', were substantially different. Unlike the Qipjaqs, Huns, Bulgars and Avars, they were not nomadic peoples who had arrived from central Asia, but rather had come from further north and were a settled, non-nomadic culture, who took full advantage of the wealth of the black soil they found themselves on. Despite a reputation as warriors and traders, for the vast majority of Rus', agriculture was their primary living.³⁵³ They grew spelt, wheat, buckwheat, rye, oats, barley, legumes and turnips. Originally, they adopted the *perelog* agricultural method, leaving land fallow after a number of years, while moving on to another strip; however, as pressure on the land increased, this was replaced by more structured fallowing, and two- or three-field crop rotation systems.³⁵⁴ The importance of agriculture to the Rus' is testified to by the *Pravda Russkaia*, in which fines were established for ploughing beyond the limits of one's own estate. This was not subsistence farming; much of this grain was grown to sell, as can be seen from various literary sources, which record the sale of wheat, rye, millet, flour and bread in Rus'

³⁵⁰ 'Qipjaq' is the name which I have chosen to use; also common are 'Cuman', 'Kun' and 'Polovtsy'. Spinei identifies at least 27 distinct names used to refer to this people, perhaps most accurately referred to as the 'Qichaq-Cuman confederation'. Victor Spinei, *The Great Migrations in the East and South-East of Europe from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dana Bădalescu (Cluj Napoca: Romanian Cultural Institute/Museum of Braila Istros, 2003).

³⁵¹ Otto of Freising, *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus*, trans. A. Schmidt, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), 448-449; Robert of Clari, *The Conquest of Constantinople*, trans. Edgar Holmes McNeal (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1936) 87.

³⁵² Victor Spinei, *The Great Migrations in the East and South-East of Europe from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dana Bădalescu (Cluj Napoca: Romanian Cultural Institute/Museum of Braila Istros, 2003), 225. Rabbi Petachia, *The Travels of Rabbi Petachia*, 3-4.

³⁵³ Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, 21; George Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), vol 2, 101.

³⁵⁴ Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*, 108-9.

domestic markets.³⁵⁵ There also appear to have been grain exports to the neighbouring Russian principality of Novgorod.³⁵⁶

With this context, and the copious attestations to Rus'-Byzantine trade in the primary literature³⁵⁷, it is easy to understand the common assumption that the Rus' continuously exported grain to Byzantium, something which took place "without a doubt" according to Balard.³⁵⁸ Other historians are more cautious with their phrasing, stating merely that "it is possible"³⁵⁹, or by bracketing grain in with other Rus' goods.³⁶⁰ Jerome Blum went as far as to say that "there is evidence" that grain was exported by the Rus' to Constantinople; however, such evidence appears to be a misreading of an extract of Leo the Deacon.³⁶¹ Given the fertility of the region, such beliefs would seem well founded. However, there is no actual evidence for such claims in the period under consideration, and rather there is evidence to the contrary. Moreover, this has been apparent since Teall's unsurpassed article on the Byzantine grain trade in 1959; it is thus hard to excuse Balard, Golden or Blum for this oversight.³⁶²

Teall noted that three relatively well-informed sources – Ibn Khordadbeh, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and *De Administrando Imperio* – did not record any Russian trade in grain, confining

³⁵⁵ Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*, 109 & 117.

³⁵⁶ Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, 21-3.

³⁵⁷ For a discussion of the literature regarding Rus'-Byzantine trade, see Chapter 4, page 182.

³⁵⁸ Michel Balard, 'Il Mar Nero, Venezia e l'Occidente intorno al 1200', 196-7. Strangely enough, Balard appears to have taken the alternative view in an earlier article, in which he states that the north Black Sea didn't partake in grain trade as neither Khazars nor Russians exported grain: Balard, 'Le commerce du blé en mer Noire (XIIIe-XVe siècles)', 65.

³⁵⁹ Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*, 117.

³⁶⁰ Peter B. Golden 'Aspects of the Nomadic Factor in the Economic Development of Kievan Rus'', *Ukrainian Economic History*, ed I. S. Koropecykj (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1991), 98. He states that Sudaq was "an important conduit for Rus' goods (grain, furs, flax, slaves) to Trabzon and beyond".

³⁶¹ Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, 21; following V. O. Kluchevsky, *A History of Russia*, trans. C. J. Hogarth (London, J. M. Dent and Sons, 1911), vol 1, 80. The extract in question has the Byzantine emperor giving grain to a defeated Russian army as part of the peace terms; Kluchevsky appears to interpret that as the Rus' giving grain to the Empire, and extrapolates from that. See Leo the Deacon, *History*, ed. C. B. Hase (Bonn: *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* 30, 1828), 156; *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, trans. and ed. Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2005), 218.

³⁶² Teall, 'The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire', 118-9. In fact, Vernadsky was the first to state that "trade in grain played but a minor role – if any – in Russian foreign commerce"; however, unlike Teall, he provides no citations to support this claim. Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*, 101.

themselves only to discussion of furs and forest produce.³⁶³ To this list, we can add several more examples: all of Ibn Rustah, Al-Istakhri, Ibn Hawqal, Ibn al Fakih, Al-Bakri or Ibn al-Athir discuss the southernward trade of the Rus', and none of them mention grain.³⁶⁴

This could, of course, be oversight – the banality and commonality of grain causing it to be too obvious to be worth a mention, although for all of the above sources to have overlooked it would be unusual. Furthermore, examination of the Rus'-Byzantine trade contracts provides further indications that the Rus' did not supply grain to Constantinople. On the contrary, both treaties recorded in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* note an obligation on the Byzantines to supply food to the Russians. The treaty of 902 is specific in that the Rus' merchants are to be provided with grain on arrival and bread upon departure; the treaty of 945 is less specific, but refers to a "monthly allowance" and Byzantine supply of provisions for the return journey.³⁶⁵ These seem unlikely clauses to have been included if the Rus' were bringing with them ample supply of grain for sale. Moreover, *De Administrando* suggests that Cherson, despite being the Byzantine border with Rus' lands, gained its grain not from the northern Chernozem belt, but from Anatolia to the south:

If the men of the city of Cherson revolt... [then the emperor] must forbid the Paphlagonian and Boukellarion merchant-ships and coastal vessels of Pontus to cross to Cherson with grain.... if grain does not pass across from Amisos and from Paphlagonia and the Boukellarioi and the flanks of the Armeniakoi, the Chersonites cannot live.³⁶⁶

An objection to this reading of the Rus'-Byzantine treaties could be that grain, without the facilities to mill it and bake the flour, or boil it, is not very useful for human consumption; therefore the grain

³⁶³ Teall, 'The Grain Supply of the Byzantine Empire', 118.

³⁶⁴ R. B Serjeant, 'Material for a History of Islamic Textiles up to the Mongol Conquest', *Ars Islamica* 15 (1951): 74, 84; M. Defrémery, 'Fragments de géographes et d'historiens Arabes et Persans', 456-7, 471-2; Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 112, 155. Note that these sources are describing produce carried by travelling Rus' merchants; as we shall discuss later, this does not preclude other foreign merchants from travelling to Rus' lands to purchase grain.

³⁶⁵ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 64-5, 77.

³⁶⁶ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 285.

provided at Constantinople is provided with these facilities in mind. However, such facilities are not mentioned in the clause, and bread is enumerated separately; thus it seems curious to omit the mention of mills if they were intended. If the Rus' were allowed to use Greek mills for their grain, they may have been able to do so tax free ("they may conduct their business... without payment of taxes"), but it is not directly specified.³⁶⁷ However, they may not have needed to do so – the Rus' may well have had their own hand-mills which they could have brought with them. Hyllestad in Norway is home to quarries where an unusual 'knobbly' stone has been mined specifically for the creation of quernstones, for the milling of cereal grains, since 700 AD.³⁶⁸ The export of these quernstones to elsewhere in the Viking world has been attested through geological analysis of excavated quernstones and quernstone fragments.³⁶⁹ Similar hand-mills have been found in excavations of Cherson, although the provenance of these stones has not yet been ascertained.³⁷⁰ Such mills became standardized at a diameter of 35-60cm and a thickness of 10-20cm during the Viking age.³⁷¹ Whilst this dense and unwieldy object may not seem ideal for transport, quernstones were in fact often included on voyages where they could serve an additional function as ballast, helping to stabilise the ship; additional ballast would be a valuable property when the journey involved crossing several rapids, as on the Rus' route down the Dnieper.³⁷² Therefore there is no reason to assume that the Kievan merchants would have been dependent upon Constantinopolitan mills to grind any grain that they may have transported. With this in mind, the Byzantine provision of grain in the above treaties does seem to imply that the

³⁶⁷ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 64-5.

³⁶⁸ Tor Grenne, Tom Heldal, Gurli B. Meyer and Elizabeth G. Bloxam, 'From Hyllestad to Selbu: Norwegian millstone quarrying through 1300 years', *Geological Survey of Norway* 11 (2008), 47-66.

³⁶⁹ Irene Baug and Øystein J. Jansen, 'Did the North Atlantic region constitute a market for quernstones from Norway during the Viking Age and Middle Ages?', *AmS-Skrifter* 24 (2014) 245-255.

³⁷⁰ Adam Rabinowitz, Larissa Sedikova and Renata Henneberg, 'Daily life in a Provincial late Byzantine City: Recent Multidisciplinary Research in the South Region of Tauric Chersonesos (Cherson)', in *Byzanz – das Römerreich im Mittelalter*, edited by Falko Daim and Jörg Drauschke (Mainz: Verlag das Romisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2010), 444 & 456,

³⁷¹ Grenne et al., 'From Hyllestad to Selbu', 48.

³⁷² Irene Baug, 'Soapstone vessels and quernstones as commodities in the Viking Age and Middle Ages', in *Viking-Age Transformations: Trade, Craft and Resources in Western Scandinavia*, edited by Zannette T. Glørstad and Kjetil Loftsgarden (London: Routledge, 2017), 151.

Rus' did not bring any with them, rather than that the Byzantines were supplying the means of rendering the grain fit for consumption.

With this evidence, we can tentatively take the stance that the Rus' were not bringing grain with them on their trade missions to Constantinople. In order to understand why this would be the case, we must consider the context of north-south Euxine trade. Obolensky hypothesized three requirements for involvement of the Chernozem belt in larger trade patterns, which were, in short, inhabitants who could provide supply; an urban demand for their produce; and means for trade between these two peoples.³⁷³ Given these three requirements, the Tauric coasts should be able to integrate with Euxine trade, and Mediterranean trade more broadly. However, despite all three conditions seeming to be met during our period, the evidence suggests that grain was not transported along the Kiev-Constantinople route.

We have already established the existence of significant, even substantial, demand for grain in Constantinople from the mid-11th century onwards. The Rus' seem to have had sufficient supply to be capable of meeting this demand. As for the means of trade between the Rus' and Byzantium, the evidence is slightly more complicated: it is not entirely clear that the Rus' had the capability to move large amounts of grain from Kiev to Constantinople. If we wish to properly establish that the Rus' had the means of delivering grain to the Empire, then we need to examine the details of their journey – in particular, whether their boats were large enough to safely transport large quantities of grain down the Dnieper to Byzantium.

The Rus' transit to Constantinople took place in “μονόξυλα” ships; this is often translated as ‘single-straker’, but this may not accurately convey the type of vessel involved.³⁷⁴ Examination of Constantine

³⁷³ Balard, ‘Il Mar Nero’, 192; Dmitri Obolensky ‘The Crimea and the North before 1204’, *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 35 (1987), 125.

³⁷⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 56, [9.1]; Teall, ‘The Grain Supply of Byzantium’, 119. A ‘Strake’ or refers to a band of wood (or metal) running the length of the ship; a single-straker would be a ship composed only of one length of wood – like a canoe; by contrast, a rowing boat has multiple strakes of

Porphyrogenetos' description of the Rus' journey to Constantinople gives us some details about μονόξυλα. These ships, literally 'one-wood' or 'single-trunk', are essentially not "built" but "κόπτουσι" – 'cut', or perhaps 'carved'.³⁷⁵ They are light enough to be carried and dragged, and had a small enough draft to travel in rivers shallow enough for a sailor to comfortably walk alongside them in the river "feeling for rocks with his feet"; however, they must also be seaworthy enough to navigate the coasts of the Euxine.³⁷⁶ They had oars, fitted in rowlocks (σκαρμούς), as opposed to free paddles, and also could be fitted with rudders and sails.³⁷⁷

Finding a definition of μονόξυλα which fits all this information is a challenging task. The connotation in modern Greek, which is that of a dugout canoe, clearly does not fit with the rudder-and-sail setup described by Porphyrogenetos. Another suggestion, offered by Kendrick, is that μονόξυλα refers to some form of a longboat ship, due to the Rus'-Viking cultural connection; he argues that these were simply derogatorily called μονόξυλα due to Byzantine contempt for their 'uncivilized' trading partners.³⁷⁸ Whilst this is possible, we should also note that these ships (the μονόξυλα) have their building process described (by Porphyrogenetos) as simply "cut", which would be an unlikely choice of word to describe the construction of a more complex ship of a longboat variety, whose construction process can hardly be described simply as 'cutting'.

However, whilst this condescension may well be true of the ships described by Psellos or other culturally disdainful authors, it does not seem to apply to Porphyrogenetos, as on another occasions he refers to Rus' ships by the term καράβια. Although this term can also mean '(scarab) beetle', the context does not suggest that it is intended to have any derogatorily primitive connotation.³⁷⁹ It seems

wood running from bow to stern. An explanation with diagrams can be found here: <https://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-strake.htm>.

³⁷⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 56-8 [9.1, 9.11].

³⁷⁶ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 58-9

³⁷⁷ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 58 [9.18], 60-61.

³⁷⁸ T. A. Kendrick, *A History of the Vikings* (London: Methuen and Co, 1930), 27.

³⁷⁹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2012), 660, l.18, 673, l.16, 674, l.9. In all three cases, the context is matter-of-fact logistical recording; I can see no sneer or snobbishness on Porphyrogenetos' part here. It may be seen that the use of the term καράβια developed over time; in 14th

unnecessary therefore to assume poor faith on Porphyrogenetos' part, especially given the importance he no doubt gave to his work. In addition, this synonymic usage of μονόξυλα / καράβια also appears in the *Chronicon Paschale*, for the Avar ships during the 626 siege of Constantinople – events to which the anonymous author was apparently an eyewitness.³⁸⁰ This refers to ships in the same fleet, and likely the same type of ship. We can work out the rough size of a καράβια using comments from Porphyrogenetos. He states that seven Rus' καράβια travelled to Italy carrying a total of 415 soldiers, meaning 59 men per ship.³⁸¹ It is possible that similar numbers could be carried in a μονόξυλα, giving some indication of their size.

This is similar to the middle ground between longboats and canoes which has been suggested by authors such as Hupchick, arguing for what is, in effect, an oversized canoe, capable of holding 40-50 people.³⁸² However, there are obvious problems with this model, not least due to the size of the tree that would be required. We do know that the Rus' used ships of this size and larger; in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the payment given to Oleg after his attack on Byzantium in 907 is calculated on the basis of 40 warriors per vessel, and Mas'ūdī even records 100-man ships in the Caspian Sea around 914.³⁸³ However, these ships set out with distinctly military purpose, and thus are unlikely to have been built to the same design as those used in trading adventures, where the emphasis was on cargo-space rather than man-power. Similarly, καράβια appear only to be mentioned in military contexts.

century Trebizond, it was been used to describe a single-masted, high-pooped, oarless ship, similar to a cog. Certainly here it is not used derogatively, but of course this cannot have been the same sort of boat used by the Rus' in the 7th century. See Antony Bryer, 'Shipping in the Empire of Trebizond', in *The Empire of Trebizond and the Pontos* (London: Variorum, 1980), VII, 7.

³⁸⁰ *Chronicon Paschale*, ed. L Dindorf, (Bonn: *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* 11, 1832) 720, l.16

³⁸¹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, 660.

³⁸² Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars for Early Medieval Balkan Hegemony: Silver-Lined Skulls and Blinded Armies* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 22.

³⁸³ *De Administrando Imperio Volume II – Commentary*, 24.

Some measure of crew size in these trading ships is available from *De Administrando*:

[regarding the navigation of rapids] Therefore the Russians put to shore, disembarking the men onto dry land, leaving the rest of the goods on board the *μονόξυλα*; they then strip and, feeling with their feet to avoid striking a rock... [lacuna]. This they do, some at the prow, some amidships, while others again, in the stern, punt with poles... when they have passed this barrage, they re-embark the others from the dry land.³⁸⁴

“Some...some...others” is conveyed by the “οἱ μὲν... οἱ δὲ...” construction, which doesn’t give a specific idea of numbers, but it must be at least six people punting the ship, possibly several more, while ‘the remainder’ [λοιποῦς] are ashore. In addition, we should note that the number of Rus’ in any one vessel is small enough that they could be easily overwhelmed by Pecheneg raiders, thus requiring (in the case of an accidental beaching) their compatriots to put ashore with them, in order to present a united front.³⁸⁵ Some further indication of crew size is given by the Rus’-Byzantine treaties from the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, which records that on arrival in Constantinople, the Rus’ were quartered in St. Mamas’, a little way outside the walls, and only admitted into the city in groups of 50 at a time.³⁸⁶ If the Rus’ were sending convoys of several 50-man ships down for trade, this would mean that on any given day the vast majority of these merchant-adventurers would be barred from the very city they were due to visit, being unable to sell their wares, enjoy the baths, or anything else they desired. This might make sense for a short visit, where an individual Rus’ only needed a few days to conduct their business, but give that the treaties make provisions for a Rus’ merchant to stay up to six months in St. Mamas’, that seems a lot of downtime – in a six or eight ship convoy, any individual merchant would only be able to sell his wares once a week.

³⁸⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 58-9.

³⁸⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 50-51.

³⁸⁶ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 64-64, 74, 77.

An alternative compromise solution, instead of Hupchick's redwood-canoes, could be the smaller, 'byrding'-style ships. Two reconstructed byrdings exist, based upon different archaeological discoveries near Skuldelev in Denmark. *Freja* needs a crew of 5-11, and can hold 20 people, with a ballast of 1.5 tons; *Roar Ege* only 5-8 people, but larger potential cargo space (3.5 tons). Both have a shallow draft of 0.8m, and a length of 14m, and both can use either sail-and-rudder or oars for power, as needed. *Roar Ege* weighs only 2 tons unladen; *Freja* 3.5, meaning it is could be carried overland by an experienced and hardy crew.³⁸⁷ Moreover, in our hypothetical 6-to-8-boat convoy, these numbers would allow an individual Rus' to be inside Constantinople selling on at least half of all days he was there. A similar identification was proposed by O. Crumlin-Pederson, though he proposed even smaller boats called "skizze", similar to a skiff, of a sort which were still in use in Scandinavia at the time of his writing.³⁸⁸

The fly in the ointment of this identification is the fact that these byrdings were built in the 'lapstrake' fashion, with overlapping planks, which would not fit with 'cut' μονόξυλα; however, these byrding examples were from Denmark, where the possibility of travel in the Baltic and North seas presented different demands than faced by our river-going Rus'. The small size of the byrdings means that similar ships could reasonably be built using an approach more fitting with our assessment of μονόξυλα. Moreover, Jenkins *et al.* note that while the base of the ship may indeed have been some sort of single-trunk canoe, there is nothing to stop the Rus' from heightening its freeboard by the addition of further lapstrake planks along the top – this could well be the unspecified "other tackle" with which they were furnished upon purchase by the Rus'.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ *Viking Today*, 'Roar Ege', <http://www.vikingtoday.com/ships/denmark/roar-ege.htm>; *Viking Today*, 'Freja' <http://www.vikingtoday.com/ships/denmark/freja-byrding.htm>.

³⁸⁸ O. Crumlin-Pederson 'Schiffe und Schifffahrtswege im Ostseeraum während des 9-12 Jahr.' *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission* 69 (1988), 538-539. This article includes pictures of modern *skizze*.

³⁸⁹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 58-9. The word 'tackle' is the rather fitting translation 'λουτὰς' used by Jenkins.

A more substantial difficulty faced by either Hupchick's grand canoes or the more modest byrdings are ones of storage. Grain, although consistently desirable and commonly available, has a drawback in as much as it is a perishable and bulky commodity. The lack of a sealed hold on these ships makes it harder to keep grain dry, especially if navigating rapids. Wet grain rots quickly, and rotten grain makes for rotten profit. It would of course be possible to take measures to ensure the dryness of the grain; however, this would be an additional difficulty in a voyage "fraught with such travail and terror, such difficulty and danger".³⁹⁰

In addition, the bulkiness of the grain itself posed further difficulties. Unlike with the larger cogs (such as those used by the Genoese to trade in grain across the high seas, rather than down rivers) it would be difficult to put enough grain on a byrding to make a substantial profit. Moreover, carrying bulky commodities would make the Rus' easier targets if they were attacked by Pecheneg raiders. The possibility of raids began at the fourth of seven rapids in the Dnieper, where the Rus' were obliged to beach their ships and carry them and their merchandise for six miles along the shore, while designated scouts kept watch for enemies. From there they were under Pecheneg eyes until they were past the Danube, and reached Bulgarian territory. These raids were apparently taken seriously – as noted, should a ship be beached accidentally, the entire convoy was obliged to stop, to present a 'united front'. Should the Pechenegs find the Rus' during portage, "they set upon them, and as [the Rus'] cannot do two things at once, they are easily routed and cut to pieces [κατασφάζονται]".³⁹¹ This threat further provided further disincentive to carry bulky commodities, as the main danger was when the Rus' were forced to unload their ships and carry their goods and μονόξυλα along the shore. Lighter, less perishable goods, such as furs, would be far easier to take care of in combat than would bulky sacks of grain that would be damaged by water.

³⁹⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 62-3.

³⁹¹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 50-51.

Thus we may have an explanation for why there is no direct record of the Rus' bringing grain to Constantinople – they did not bring it. Whilst they engaged continually in commerce with the Empire, this commerce was mostly focussed on the import and export of other commodities, more luxurious in nature. The hazards of bringing grain down the Dnieper were many: the grain could rot, be lost, or impede the Rus' merchants during an attack by Pecheneg (or other) raiders. Much easier and more profitable goods were available for export, and the Rus' would no doubt have preferred those as their cargos. Μονόξυλα were simply not designed for agricultural exports.

The Cherson Connection

There was, however, an alternative route for grain to be exported from Rus' lands to Constantinople. Instead of the Rus' riparian route, grain could be exported overland by terrestrial merchants to Cherson, whence they could be loaded into ships better suited for cereal exports over the Euxine waters.³⁹²

Proving the existence of grain exports from Cherson is not an easy task. Indeed, the only written evidence regarding Cherson and grain is that of grain *imports*: Porphyrogenetos describes the

³⁹² At this juncture, we should note a further curiosity about Constantine's description of the journey from Russia to Constantinople, in that it doesn't reach Constantinople. Once they leave the Dnieper river, the Rus' travel to the mouth of the Dniester, to Aspros, to the Danube, to Konopas, to Constanta, to Varna, to Ditzina, and then they "reach the district of Mesembria, and there their voyage is at an end." This is a curious place to end a voyage to Constantinople, as you are still rather far from the city – certainly further away than the distance of any of the previous legs of the journey. It seems most likely that Constantine simply omitted the rest of the voyage, by intent or by accident. Alternatively, it is possible that the Russians really did beach their μονόξυλα in Mesembria, and thence take different transport the rest of the way. Travelling overland seems unlikely; the region between Mesembria and Constantinople is quite mountainous, and even Byzantine armies, when travelling to war against the Bulgars in Mesembria, travelled by ship. However, Mesembria was a significant merchant port in its own right. If the Rus' were travelling in small boats, braving the Bosphorus might be a dangerous, even reckless choice, given the strength of its currents and the lack of a keel to keep the μονόξυλα stable. Perhaps the Rus' took passage for the last leg of the voyage aboard larger, sturdier ships, from local merchants already plying the Constantinople-Mesembria route. (However, this begs the question as to what happened to the abandoned μονόξυλα for the up to six months that the Rus' were in Constantinople.) If this were the case, then there is a further possibility to explain the lack of Rus' grain imports. Mesembria was already a significant grain hub, providing grain from Bulgaria to Constantinople. If the Rus' had brought grain with them, and changed ship at Mesembria, then their grain may no longer have been seen as distinct from the other grain brought in from Bulgaria on those same ships – it was all 'grain from Mesembria', as far as the Constantinopolitans were concerned. This is, of course, just speculation, but it remains an interesting possibility. Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 56-61.

necessity of grain shipments from northern Anatolia, without which “the Chersonites cannot live”.³⁹³ This is because Cherson itself, though in the Crimea, does not sit on the Chernozem Belt, from which it is separated by the Crimean mountain range. As a result, the region of the city itself is comparatively infertile.³⁹⁴ Indeed, archaeological evidence demonstrates the agricultural poverty of Cherson, after the Fall of Constantinople had caused the loss of much of its trade (particularly with now-Turkish Anatolia). Excavations of a church found a number of skeletons “showing signs of vitamin deficiencies that are hard to reconcile with easy access to... extensively cultivated agricultural territory.”³⁹⁵ All excavated tombs showed symptoms of anaemia, rickets or scurvy, demonstrated by ‘pitting’ in the skull, bones, or eye sockets. One child, no older than two, seemed to suffer from both scurvy and rickets at the time of his death.³⁹⁶ Scurvy requires approximately three months of no fresh vegetables or fruit, hence its usual association with ocean-going voyages. Since such briny expeditions can hardly have been the case for the Chersonite skeletons, the inability to engage in local agriculture is a far more likely scenario. Thus we can be sure that, in happier times, the Chersonites had depended on grain imports to supplement their diet, or else the city could never have flourished. However, these necessities of import do not preclude further export of the grain: simply because Cherson required Anatolian grain imports to feed itself, does not mean it imported Anatolian grain *only* in order to feed itself. Some could have been bought for local use, and the rest bought for further export.

Indeed, Cherson does seem to have been an important ‘trans-shipment’ location. It must be remembered that Cherson, although ‘across the sea’, is surprisingly close to Anatolia. For much of the northern coastline (approximately everywhere east of Amastris), Cherson is actually closer than Constantinople. Sergii Zelenko estimated the shortest crossing of the Black Sea from Anatolia to the

³⁹³ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 284-5.

³⁹⁴ John Smedley, ‘Some aspects of trade in Cherson, 6th-10th Centuries’, *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 34 (1977), 22.

³⁹⁵ Rabinowitz, Sedikova and Henneberg, ‘Daily life in a Provincial late Byzantine City’, 453-4.

³⁹⁶ Rabinowitz, Sedikova and Henneberg, ‘Daily life in a Provincial late Byzantine City’, 466-8.

Crimea at approximately 163 miles, starting from the headland of Sinope.³⁹⁷ Since deep-water sailing is known to have taken place in the Black Sea during the 11th century, this suggests the possibility of Cherson as a trade depot of sorts – a centralised point to and from which goods could be imported and then re-exported from a variety of Black Sea ports.³⁹⁸ Historically, Cherson was certainly an important commercial port, compared with Venice as a trading centre.³⁹⁹ In an excellent parallel, Porphyrogenetos records the historical freedom from tribute granted to “the city and its sailors”; in addition, he notes that the city relies upon the purchase of goods from the Pechenegs and the subsequent resale of them elsewhere in the empire: “If the Chersonites do not journey to Romania and sell the hides and wax that they get by trade from the Pechenegs, they cannot live.”⁴⁰⁰ Evidence of similar connections between Anatolia and the Sea of Azov exist: Epiphanius the Monk (8th-9th centuries) made a journey from Sinope to Cherson, and thence to the Straits of Kerch.⁴⁰¹ This suggests such a route was easier, or at least more easily available, than a direct Anatolia-Azov voyage.

An important question is whether there were such trans-shipment routes running in a triangle trade: Anatolia -> Crimea -> Constantinople (or vice-versa). It is certainly a possibility.⁴⁰² This need not only be true for those parts of Anatolia without their own merchant class; even for those with a significant merchant body, the grain demand in Cherson and its relative proximity may have made it a more alluring destination than Constantinople for some merchants, even if the final destination of their

³⁹⁷ Sergii Zelenko, ‘The Maritime Trade of the Medieval Black Sea’, in *The Sea in History: The Medieval World*, edited by Michel Balard (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), 450. I cannot make this estimate work exactly on a point-to-point basis; but the difference is minimal. On a port-to-port journey, the distance would be slightly longer – not quite 320 kilometres or 200 miles.

³⁹⁸ Jacoby, ‘Byzantine Maritime Trade’, 633.

³⁹⁹ Smedley, ‘Some aspects of trade in Cherson’, 20-21.

⁴⁰⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 264-5 & 284-5. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁰¹ There is some doubt over how far Epiphanius actually travelled himself, but the route described is surely reasonable. Epiphanius, ‘Vita S. Andreae’, 216-60; Zelenko, ‘The Maritime Trade of the Medieval Black Sea’, 451; Mango, ‘A Journey Round the Coast of the Black Sea in the Ninth Century’, 262-4.

⁴⁰² Shepard, ‘Constantinople – Gateway to the North’, in *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, ed. Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron (London: Variorum, 1995), 244-5.

produce was the capital, given the extra taxes levied on entry to the city, as the merchants could be doubly sure of a customer upon arrival.⁴⁰³

Porphyrogenetos records the presence of Chersonite sailors with cargos in Constantinople.⁴⁰⁴ The route these merchants would have taken to get to the city is unclear, however. If the Chersonite merchants attempted to follow the central ‘maritime highway’ between Crimea and Anatolia, and thence follow the Anatolian coastline to Constantinople, the grain which they carried would, to some extent, be doubling back on itself. Such an inefficient system seems unlikely – why not leave the grain at a suitable Anatolian depot like Sinope, instead of crossing the Euxine twice? On the other hand, the northern coastal route is possible, following the Western Gyre across to the coast near Varna, and following the shoreline the rest of the way to Constantinople. This has some advantage over the Anatolian route – firstly, it does not involve the grain ‘retracing its steps’, and secondly, it would give any grain merchant the opportunity to pick up further grain from the western coast of the Black Seawhich they could then resell in Constantinople. Moreover, Porphyrogenetos informs us that Chersonite merchants were in the habit of travelling to “Romania”, meaning other lands in the Byzantine Empire, but is not specific as to where those lands were; the western coast seems a likely spot, however, suggesting this as a potential route for the Cherson-Constantinople Cherson-Constantinople connection.; whilst this doesn’t involve retracing one’s path, it wouldn’t necessarily be any faster than the southern coastal route.⁴⁰⁵ A third option is suggested by a passage from Choniates:

While making his escape, [Andronikos] came to Chele...when the inhabitants there saw... that he was hastening to sail on to the Tauro-Scythians as a fugitive... they prepared a ship and Andronikos boarded it with his followers. But even the sea

⁴⁰³ Angeliki E. Laiou and Cecile Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 52.

⁴⁰⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 52-3.

⁴⁰⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 286-7.

was vexed with Andronikos... the waves rose straight up and fell back into a yawning chasm and leaped up again to swallow him, and the ship was cast towards shore. Again and again this happened, and Andronikos was hindered from crossing over [περαίωσιν] before his captors arrived on the scene.⁴⁰⁶

Chele is an elusive location; however, elsewhere Choniates describes it as on the coast near the mouth of the Bosphorus.⁴⁰⁷ In this case, Andronikos is attempting to head to the Crimea as fast as possible, fleeing from the pursuing forces of Isaac Komnenos, the new emperor, and attempting to “cross over” from Chele at the mouth of the Bosphorus – it is here, not at or near Sinope, that Andronikos chooses to change to a different ship. The implication of this is that he was no longer pursuing a coastal route, but rather attempting open-water travel straight to the Crimea. The fact that he was unsuccessful should not detract from this.

The route appears feasible. As noted before, the Sinope-Cherson journey, approximately 200 miles as the crow flies, was estimated as 24 hours in the Antique era; for Ibn Battuta in the 1320s, it would take three nights; however, he was sailing for Qiram, near Theodosia, approximately 80 miles further east along the coast, and was travelling in difficult weather.⁴⁰⁸ With this in mind, we can approximate the journey from Cherson to the Bosphorus – slightly over 300 miles, 50% longer than the Sinope-Cherson leg. Assuming consistent sailing speed, this would be a journey of between 36 hours and 5 days, depending on the weather – well within the capabilities of the wreck found at Serçe Limanı, which was estimated at having an open-water capability of over a week.⁴⁰⁹

If this reading of Choniates is valid, then the idea of an Anatolia – Cherson – Constantinople triangle trade becomes more interesting, as the possibility of sailing directly from Cherson to Constantinople

⁴⁰⁶ Choniates, *Historiae*, 347-8; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 192.

⁴⁰⁷ Choniates, *Historiae*, 309; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium* 171; N. Bănescu, ‘Chilia (Licostomo) und das bithynische Χηλή’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 28 (1928), 68-72.

⁴⁰⁸ Morton, *The Role of the Physical Environment in Ancient Greek Seafaring*, 164 n28; Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-54*, trans. H. A. R. Gibb (London: Broadway House, 1929), 147-55.

⁴⁰⁹ Bass et al., *Serçe Limanı*, 485, 339

becomes real – and more so, when you remember that this route would have caused the merchants to have the wind at their backs, making the voyage to Constantinople all the easier. However, we must be cautious on attempting to read too much into one word of Choniates' text, and, unfortunately, there is little further evidence regarding the details of journeys between Constantinople and Cherson. Direct, open-water voyaging between the Crimea and Constantinople remains a speculation.

However, the possibility of Cherson as a grain centre is more readily supported by both archaeological and sigillographic evidence. Excavations of a grocers shop in Cherson (believed to have been destroyed suddenly in a fire during the early 13th century) reveal a variety of grains for sale – wheat, rye, barley, emmer, millet, einkorn and spelt, some of these apparently “in bulk”.⁴¹⁰ Interestingly, these grains are in various stages of refinement: the bread-wheat appears to have been finely-sieved before being made available for sale, but the rest had not been fully processed. This suggests that while some of the grains were ‘local’ (or at least, in a relative sense), the bread-wheat was from further afield.⁴¹¹

Also important are the 11th-century seals of “Ioannes, *Gennematas* of Chrysopolis and the Straits”. Five of these seals are extant, and three of those were found in Cherson. Details regarding the office of *gennematas* (γεννηματᾶς) are few; all that is known is that it had some connection with grain production and supply. Aleksejenko, in his examination of these seals, came to the conclusion that their presence in Cherson suggested the export of grain from Chrysopolis to Cherson.⁴¹² This hardly seems reasonable. Chrysopolis (modern Üsküdar) sat directly across the straits from Constantinople; although separated from the city by the Bosphorus, during peacetime it was effectively a suburb of the capital, and was thus not producing its own grain. Thus there is no reason for a low-ranking official to be responsible for the grain provisions of distant Cherson (which still had its own *Strategos*) when

⁴¹⁰ Rabinowitz, Sedikova and Henneberg, ‘Daily life in a Provincial late Byzantine City’, 453-4.

⁴¹¹ Rabinowitz, Sedikova and Henneberg, ‘Daily life in a Provincial late Byzantine City’, 454.

⁴¹² Nikolaj A. Aleksejenko, *Sfragistyka Bizantyńska – Molibdobule Chersonu* (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2015), 94-7.

he was not even supplying the grain.⁴¹³ A far more reasonable assumption is that the trade connection between Chrysopolis and Cherson originates in Cherson; in this case, the presence of the seals in Cherson would be suggestive of grain in Cherson being earmarked for the supply of the capital. This practice we know existed, not least because the monastery of Great Lavra at Athos was granted immunity from such commandeering in 1102 by Alexios I Komnenos.⁴¹⁴ If this were the case, this would be indicative at least of large supplies of grain available for purchase/requisition in Cherson; moreover, this would imply that there were present other quantities of grain, not being requisitioned by John the *Gennematas*, presumably intended for sale not in Chrysopolis or Constantinople, but elsewhere.

Given the decline in Anatolian grain in the 11th century, the grain which it had formerly supplied to Cherson must have come from elsewhere, at least in part. It is thus tempting to try and connect Cherson with the apparently untapped excess of grain in the Kievan realm. We know of trade connections between Cherson and the Rus' directly. Cherson lies on the peninsula of Crimea, considerably east of the mouth of the Dnieper, and thus was not on the Kiev-Constantinople route as recorded by Porphyrogenetos.⁴¹⁵ However, there were overland connections. The ford of the Dnieper called "Vrar" was identified by Porphyrogenetos as an important crossing point between Byzantine Cherson and Russia. Porphyrogenetos does not give a reason for these journeys, but trade is surely the most reasonable one.⁴¹⁶ Whether they brought back grain from Kiev to Cherson, it is difficult to say. If we return to our excavated grocery, we can note the presence of spelt, an unpopular

⁴¹³ 'John, imperial protospatharios and strategos of Cherson (Tenth century)', *Dumbarton Oaks: Online Catalogue of Byzantine Seals*, <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.4036>.

⁴¹⁴ André Guillou, Paul Lemerle and Nicolas Svoronos, *Actes de Lavra* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1970), vol 1, 55.45-9.

⁴¹⁵ Smedley, 'Some aspects of trade in Cherson', 25.

⁴¹⁶ Vernadsky even claims that there were Greek merchants in living in Kiev during this period "mentioned in the sources". As always, it is unclear which sources he refers to. Although the *Paterik* of the Kievan Cave Monastery does mention Greek merchants in Kiev, they are explicitly travellers who do not 'reside' there as Vernadsky claims. Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 60-61; Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*, 119; *Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, trans. Muriel Heppell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 11.

grain in Byzantium more broadly, and an “unusual” prevalence of barley-wheat. Both these grains are known to have been grown by the Rus’; however, such a connection is tentative at best.

Thus, whilst it seems likely that Cherson, despite its own infertile land, engaged in some level of re-exportation of grain to the rest of the Byzantine empire, we cannot confidently assert that this grain was Russian in origin – it remains only a speculative possibility. If it were true that grain was being bought by Chersonites in Kievan markets and carried back to the port overland, this would explain some of the conundra surrounding the apparent grain hoard of the Rus’: the Chersonite markets would provide a significant route of export for any surplus grain the Rus’ grew, whilst also satisfying the proposition that the Rus’ themselves are never known to have carried it. This would, therefore, be a satisfying solution, but current evidence does not allow us to conclusively either support or refute it.

iv. Bread and Caucasus: Agriculture and Georgia’s Golden Age

A second potential supply of grain from beyond the borders of Byzantium could be found in the Caucasus region, dominated during this period by the Kingdom of Georgia. Though this kingdom was beset by difficulties during the 11th century, in the form of internal strife and, from 1080, Seljuq depredations, it experienced a restoration under Davit IV the Restorer and Tamar the Great during the 12th century.⁴¹⁷ In particular, their reigns saw the restoration and development of the kingdom’s agricultural and trading prospects. Despite a new abundance of grain, and a flourishing mercantile economy, Georgian grain is not well-attested in the Black Sea; however, this may well have been due to it being ‘rebranded’ as Anatolian grain when sold in Pontic ports.

Georgia had long been recognised as a fertile and productive land; both Porphyrogenetos and Attaleiates (among many others) commented on its exceptional prosperity.⁴¹⁸ However, the arrival of

⁴¹⁷ A brief description of 11th/12th century Georgia can be found in the background chapter on pages 17-19.

⁴¹⁸ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 216-7; Attaleiates, *The History*, 144-5.

the Seljuqs and the resulting devastation had reduced Georgia's agricultural economy to the point of "extinction."⁴¹⁹ The *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the collection of official Georgian histories, states that "when Davit became king, K'art'li (Georgia) was ruined, and except for the castles there was nowhere anyone in a village, nor was there any building."⁴²⁰ However, a combination of grassroots resilience and substantial crown action allowed the country to recover with remarkable speed. The first step was, naturally, Davit's eviction of the Seljuqs. The Georgian peasants had suffered horribly under Seljuq incursions; not only had their fields and vineyards been devastated, but also they had been the ones to provide the bulk of the tribute Georgi II had agreed to pay.⁴²¹ Davit did away with this tribute in 1099.⁴²² The Seljuqs would not be entirely cast out until 1121 and the Battle of Didgori; however, their raids became more and more rare as Davit's military successes continued.⁴²³

Direct state intervention in agriculture also took more 'concrete' form. Georgian agriculture made extensive use of irrigation canals. Some of these were small, local canals, dealing only with one village or household. However, Tamar's reign saw the building of several much larger canals, at the direction of the crown, such as those at Tiriponi and Mukhrani. Samgori's irrigation system was based on a canal 20 kilometres in length. However, this was dwarfed by the Alazan irrigation network, which ran for nearly 6 times the distance, and watered 53,000 hectares in the process. This was enough to provide for at least 8,800 *pudze* – the plot of land allocated to one Georgian peasant household. However, by Tamar's reign it was common to allocate more than one family to a *pudze*, meaning conceivably as many as 10,000 families were served by this single irrigation canal. These canals were, according to Lordkipanidze, particularly advanced for the time, as can be seen by the pipes in the Vardzia, Dmanisi, Geguti and Tbilisi irrigation networks.⁴²⁴ Moreover, new approaches and systems were being devised

⁴¹⁹ Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 38.

⁴²⁰ Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 316; 'Life of David, King of Kings', 317.

⁴²¹ Mariam Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII Centuries*, trans. David Skvirsky (Tbilisi, Ganatelba, 1987), 24.

⁴²² Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 317; Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 86; Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 43.

⁴²³ Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 38-43.

⁴²⁴ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 14, 23, 27.

by Georgian engineers, as can be seen in the unique system of the Nadarbazevi network.⁴²⁵ This web of irrigation systems was combined with alternative fertilizing procedures, such as artificial bogging of land.⁴²⁶

A further boon to agriculture of Georgia was the 'import' of 40,000 Qipjaq families from the steppe. The Qipjaqs, having been defeated by the Kievan Rus', were granted safe passage into Georgia by Davit IV.⁴²⁷ This was primarily a military strategy; the Qipjaqs were held in very high esteem as mercenaries, to the extent that Arab rulers had their own officers learn Qipjaq so as to make better use of them. They were also employed by the Rus', Hungarians and Egyptians.⁴²⁸ Davit intended to use the Qipjaqs more permanently, to form the basis of a royal army, for "he knew well the multitude of the Qipjaq people, their courage in warfare, their skill in manoeuvring, the violence of their attack, that they were easily controlled and completely prepared to carry out his will."⁴²⁹ The *Kartlis* describes them as 40,000 "elite soldiers", and a further 5,000 "elite attendants, trained for service, dependable and tested in valour".⁴³⁰ Each family was to provide one soldier and one horse to the Georgian throne. In order to prevent rebellious tendencies, efforts were made to assimilate the Qipjaqs and convert them to Christianity; this was done by settling them in "suitable places", and giving them land to farm. Thus, in addition to providing himself with the core of a personal standing army, Davit's Qipchaqs also brought a further 40,000 farmers into his land.⁴³¹

Another key development, and perhaps uniquely one for which no Georgian monarch could take credit, is the invention of the *gutani*. Previously, Georgian farmers had made use of the basic plough

⁴²⁵ Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 159.

⁴²⁶ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 29.

⁴²⁷ Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 328; 'Life of David, King of Kings', 178-9; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 91. This was possibly done in concert with the Rus', a suggestions made on the basis of now-lost sources, the 18th century Arab historian Paul of Aleppo suggested that Rus' soldiers were involved in helping Davit transfer the nomads. For further information on possible Rus'-Georgian alliance regarding the Qipjaqs, see Maximilian C. G. Lau, 'Multilateral Co-Operation in the Black Sea'.

⁴²⁸ Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 81-2.

⁴²⁹ Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 327; 'Life of David, King of Kings', 178.

⁴³⁰ Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 328; 'Life of David, King of Kings', 178-9.

⁴³¹ Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 327-9; 'Life of David, King of Kings', 178-9; Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 81-2.

called *erkvani*. However, during this period of agricultural rebirth, a new, form of the implement appeared – the *gutani*, or ‘big plough’.⁴³² It could plough deeper, and deal with tougher soils; however, it required eight to ten pair of oxen to pull it. As a result, the *gutani* and draft animals were often held in common by several *pudze* households. The success of the *gutani* as an implement can be seen both by its popularity – the tool spread to the Armenian, Ossetian, Chechen and Ingush peoples, among others – and also its longevity; as it was still the plough of choice in the Caucasus during the late 1800s, a full seven centuries later.⁴³³

Thus in a matter of decades, the Kingdom of Georgia went from a country “devastated”, back to normal levels, and then further increased its agricultural output, in part by expanding the available land and labour force, and in part by intensifying its agricultural methods. Davit “made all the regions of the east flourish, and filled them with inhabitants”.⁴³⁴ The result was, by Manvelichvili’s approximation, that 12th century Georgia was producing enough grain to nourish a population thrice its size.⁴³⁵

This abundance of grain was supported by crown investments in trade. These were not just focussed on domestic commerce, but also promoted transit and international trade. Previously, roads in Armenia and Kartli were famously poor, being one of the two reasons 10th century Arab merchants were hesitant to trade in Tbilisi (the other was having to travel through *kafir* territory to get there).⁴³⁶ One of the many praises included in the encomium of Davit the Restorer which concludes the account of his reign in the *Kartlis* indicates a significant degree of investment into Georgia’s road network: “How many bridges over violent rivers [did he build], how many roads difficult of passage, did he pave with stone”.⁴³⁷ Similarly, Tamar did much work on the roads, ensuring that Kartli was linked with the

⁴³² Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 159.

⁴³³ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 29.

⁴³⁴ Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 338; ‘Life of David, King of Kings’, 182.

⁴³⁵ Alexandre Manvelichvili, *Histoire de Géorgie* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions de la Toison d’Or, 1951), 199.

⁴³⁶ Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 72.

⁴³⁷ Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 344-345; ‘Life of David, King of Kings’, 186.

whole of Georgia by a well-maintained network.⁴³⁸ In addition to this, both Davit and Tamar built inns and caravanserais for travelling merchants to stay in, free of charge, and took steps to ensure their safety. One of the first acts of Tamar as king⁴³⁹, while co-regent with Giorgi II, was the convention of a special legislative council which established capital punishment for brigands and those engaged in “buccaneering”, regardless of social status.⁴⁴⁰ As a result of these efforts, the *Kartlis* puts great emphasis on the protection of private property during Tamar’s reign. “Nobody robbed caravans. Peace and tranquillity reigned [and] there were no thieves nor malefactors, and those who found stolen goods brought them to the king’s court and left them under banners. Nobody dared to steal – neither the Ossetians nor the Mtiulis, nor the Qipjaqs nor the Svans.”⁴⁴¹ Whilst the claims may not be unusual in themselves, for such eulogistic sources, the prominence given to safety from theft, compared to other virtues of rule (piety, for example), is significant.

These economic investments led to the growth of new urban centres. Georgia had been steadily urbanizing since the ninth century. However, the rate of this urbanization drastically accelerated during the 11th century, as shown by the introduction to the Georgian language of the new terms *kalaki*, ‘town’, and *ubani*, ‘suburb’.⁴⁴² Both Rayfield and Lordkipanidze suggest that 12th century Tbilisi had a population well in excess of 100,000.⁴⁴³ This natural growth was coupled with direct state intervention – Bagrat IV personally ordered the establishment of Akhalkalaki (literally ‘New-town’) in 1064. It would, unfortunately be destroyed by the Seljuqs a mere two years later, and have to be

⁴³⁸ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 40.

⁴³⁹ Though female, Tamar nonetheless adopted the title of “*Mepet mepe*”, ‘King of Kings’, rather than queen (“*dedopali*”). As a result, she is referred to as ‘King’ throughout this thesis.

⁴⁴⁰ Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 130. “Buccaneering” is the translation provided by Metreveli; however, it seems that the usual nautical connotation should not be inferred here.

⁴⁴¹ A similar chronicle also claims that during the reign of Giorgi II, not a single chicken was stolen. Somehow, this seems less flattering. ‘The Chronicle of Giorgi Lasha and His Time’, trans Medea Abashidze, in *The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba*, ed. Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), 203; Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 305-6.

⁴⁴² Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 73.

⁴⁴³ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 42; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 72. Neither commentator provides a citation for their claim. Rayfield goes to further extravagance by comparing this population to that of Paris or Samarkand, again without citation. Given the difficulty in estimating medieval populations without concrete data (see page 107), it is hard to see how Rayfield can make such a claim accurately.

rebuilt.⁴⁴⁴ This did not deter Bagrat, who also invested in the creation of a town at Ateni. There had been a settlement there since the 7th century (shown by the still-standing church); however, Bagrat ordered the construction of new houses, shops, and the obligatory palace. To further entice new burghers, the inhabitants were granted privileges, and the king even “donated his own vineyard”.⁴⁴⁵ Davit IV would found another town nearby, named Gori, using refugees from Armenia. Other towns and cities which appeared at this time were Zhinvali, Baraleti, Surami, Ali, and Zovreti.⁴⁴⁶

Particular attention was given to the city of Tbilisi which had long been a centre of trade in the region. It was only brought under direct Georgian control at the very end of Davit’s reign (1121-1123, depending on the source). Matthew of Edessa describes a violent capture of the city, in which Davit “slaughtered a goodly number of the city’s inhabitants. Moreover, he impaled 500 men who subsequently died from this horrible torture”.⁴⁴⁷ This may have been true; however, it is quite a contrast to other accounts of the siege. An Arab historian called Al-Aini claims that Davit “showed a greater consideration for Muslims than had the Muslim princes themselves”.⁴⁴⁸ Certainly Davit showed a rather tolerant policy. Georgians in Tbilisi were obliged to pay 5 dinars in tax; however, in a bid to promote foreign merchant trade, Jews were only obliged to pay 4, and Muslims 3 dinars. Moreover, in a rather sensitive gesture, Davit completely forbade the slaughter of pigs in the city, in deference to Islamic (and perhaps Jewish) views on the animal.⁴⁴⁹

These towns were the homes of the merchants. In Georgia, these merchants consisted of two kinds – free, and bonded. A strange form of merchant-serfdom existed, in which the merchant would produce

⁴⁴⁴ Kalistrat Salia, *History of the Georgian Nation*, trans. Katharine Vivian (Paris; N. Salia, 1983), 185-6.

⁴⁴⁵ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 34.

⁴⁴⁶ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 33.

⁴⁴⁷ Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades, 10th-12th centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, trans Ara Edmond Dostourian (New York, NY: University Press of America, 1993), 228.

⁴⁴⁸ W. E. D. Allen, *A History of the Georgian people, from the beginning down to the Russian conquest in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and co, 1932), 333.

⁴⁴⁹ Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 93; V. Minorsky, ‘Caucasia in the History of Mayyāfārīqin’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13 (1949), 33. Intriguingly, the *Kartlis* only very briefly mention the capture of Tbilisi, which one would expect to be eulogised to a much greater extent than it is. Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 333; ‘Life of David, King of Kings’, 184.

and sell for his master, and in addition hand over a portion of the profits from their own sales to their lords.⁴⁵⁰ Moreover, if you were not a designated merchant, it became difficult to sell your wares independently. A peasant who wished to sell some homemade product – a wax candle, say - would not only be taxed on the commercial transaction itself (of course); they would further have to pay a levy for the right to engage in that transaction in the first place, and also a tax on the selling of wax specifically (or of silk, or of wine, or of any of a whole list of commodities). Woe betide them if they wished to sell something by weight – the opportunity to use the official (and thus the only legal) scales of a town required further payment.⁴⁵¹ All this encouraged the growth of a professional, legally-designated merchant class, free from some of these taxes and not tied to the land, allowing the movement of substantial commodities with greater ease.

For those lucky merchants who were independent of lord and land, great wealth awaited. Although “vacharni” are only first mentioned in 1020, they rapidly rose to prominence.⁴⁵² The focus was on caravan trade, and thus guilds were established, allowing for communal travel; in addition, there was an elite class of *didvacharni*, ‘great merchants’, headed by an elder *vachartukhutsesi*, appointed either by the crown or by the merchants themselves (it is unclear). This merchant class clearly flourished. Numismatic evidence in the form of excavated coins supports trade with Byzantium, the Ayyubids, Iran, the Seljuqs of Konya, numerous Arabic countries, Slavs, Armenia, and Egypt.⁴⁵³ “Wool of Alexandria” was a popular commodity during Tamar’s reign, and Tamar herself was noted to use it extensively in her personal spinning and sewing.⁴⁵⁴ Moreover, domestic merchants rapidly rose to

⁴⁵⁰ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 36.

⁴⁵¹ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 25.

⁴⁵² It has been suggested that the vacharni were granted the right to wear special garb, based on a line from *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*: “მე სავაჭრობა ჩავიცვამ”; “I will clothe myself as a merchant”. However, this does not seem to me a reasonable interpretation without corroborating evidence. That the knight could disguise himself as a merchant does not mean they had special clothes denoting their social rank, but rather just customary garb and paraphernalia. If such an interpretation is to be valid, it requires more evidence than a single, ambiguous line of poetry.

⁴⁵³ Salia, *History of the Georgian Nation*, 185.

⁴⁵⁴ Basil Ezosmodzghvari, ‘The Life of Tamar, The Queen of Queens’, trans. Dmitri Gamq’relidze, in *The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba*, ed. Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), 262.

become a part of Georgia's political classes. It began with their appointment as public prosecutors, but by Tamar's reign they had successfully infiltrated court circles, and held some influence over the crown.⁴⁵⁵

The importance of merchants to this revitalised Georgian state can be seen by the political power gained by the *didvacharni*, which is exemplified in two key incidents of Tamar's reign. First are the circumstances surrounding her ill-starred marriage to Yuri, also called Georgi the Russian, a prince sheltering in the lands of the Qipjaqs after being expelled by a usurper who had murdered his father. Tamar was under pressure by her council and her aunt Rusudan, to marry and produce an heir, for the stability of the kingdom. Various court factions vied to have their candidate selected, and Yuri certainly had many potentially good qualities – he was of noble birth, and an orthodox Christian to boot. However, he had no connections in Georgia itself, nor any support from his home, and would thus require friends in his new court who could, no doubt, expect to be rewarded for their selfless amicability and comradely aid.⁴⁵⁶ As a result, Yuri's candidacy gained support among those members of the court whose connections to power were slim – i.e., not the nobles whose importance was guaranteed by blood and (in practice) hereditary titles, but those whose power depended on mutable characteristics, such as wealth and individual favour – the *vadcharni*. It is not coincidence that the man sent to bring Yuri to Georgia was a prominent merchant from Tbilisi, Zankan Zorababeli, “an influential person in the Kingdom”.⁴⁵⁷ Moreover, those who were rapidly promoted during Yuri's (short) tenure as king consort, and those who supported his two attempts to return to Georgia, speak to his support among the urban classes: Abulasan, mayor of Tbilisi and voice of the merchant-class on the royal council, rose to become Eristavi (=Duke) of Kartli, Georgia's central and most important province, and even more illustriously *mechurchletukhutsesi* – high royal treasurer. If the account of Tamar's historian is to be believed, it was Abulasan who suggested Yuri initially, claiming to “know” him, hinting at

⁴⁵⁵ Allen, *A History of the Georgian people*, 231.

⁴⁵⁶ Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 142-3.

⁴⁵⁷ Ezosmodzghvari, ‘The Life of Tamar, the Queen of Queens’, 243; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 109

Abulasan's experience in the Qipjaq lands, which could only have been for trading purposes.⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, during both of Yuri's attempted coups, his supporters included various Tbilisi merchants.⁴⁵⁹

Also indicative of the political and economic power of the merchant class is the uprising of Qutlu Arslan. The first *mechurchletukhutsesi* of Tamar, early on in her reign he organised a rebellion, with the aim of setting up a council independent of the crown with significant powers of its own – the right to try cases, appoint and dismiss holders of various offices, *et cetera*. It would report to, but not be subservient to, the crown. Moreover, unlike the existing royal council *Darbazi*, it would not be filled with nobles and churchmen, but a wider selection of notables. His rebellion was more or less stillborn; however, the comments of contemporary chroniclers on Qutlu and his rebels are important – he had “a high position because of his wealth”, as “lowborn people [can] reach a high position by being rich”; similarly, his rebels were “bold in their actions due to their wealth”.⁴⁶⁰ Qutlu himself appears to have been an assimilated Qipjaq; his name means ‘lucky lion’ in Turkic.⁴⁶¹ Donald Rayfield's assertion that he belonged to the aristocratic Jaqeli family seems mistaken, except perhaps by affiliation – certainly not by birth, as all sources are in agreement that “Qutlu Arslan came from the lower classes but had a crafty mind”.⁴⁶² Although Qutlu's attempt to moderate royal power was unsuccessful, it is worth noting that several posts in the existing council were later filled by urban notables – bankers, merchants and mayors.⁴⁶³ Clearly, the merchant class of Georgia was in the ascent during this period, and with good reason.

⁴⁵⁸ Ezosmodzghvari, ‘The Life of Tamar, the Queen of Queens’, 243. Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 109.

⁴⁵⁹ Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 111.

⁴⁶⁰ Ezosmodzghvari, ‘The Life of Tamar, the Queen of Queens’, 241.

⁴⁶¹ Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 137.

⁴⁶² ‘The History and Eulogy of Monarchs’, trans. Dmitri Gamq'relidze, in *The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba*, ed. Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishing, 2014), 241; Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 108.

⁴⁶³ Salia, *History of the Georgian Nation*, 186. Unfortunately, Salia does not go into more depth about what is meant by “banker”, and whether he is suggesting a unique class of financial operator.

Clearly, by the early 12th century, Georgia had a flourishing merchant economy, and the crown reaped its share. The wealth of Georgia became almost fabled. By the end of the 12th century, the crown revenues of Georgia – excluding additional income from the dozen-or-so tributary states around her borders – was more than 1.5 times that of the Caliphate of Baghdad.⁴⁶⁴ This is all the more impressive as it predates Tamar’s campaign against the Seljuqs of Konya, which established the Empire of Trebizond and brought its valuable ports entirely into Georgia’s orbit.

Invisible Exports? An Explanation

The above evidence indicates a surplus of grain being produced in Georgia, and an abundance of merchants available to trade it. However, we do not hear of Georgian grain exports, nor of others buying grain from Georgia. The explanation for this may simply be a matter of branding – Georgian grain being sold under non-Georgian flags.

The Caucasus has always been a part of major trans-Eurasian trade routes. From the steppes to the north was the valuable Volga trade route, coming from Sarkel and Atil and later Serai, southwards, via Samandar and Derbent along the Caspian coast, and then either to Tbilisi or Baku, and then onwards. From the East came the Silk Roads, one route of which came north of the Caspian Sea, meeting the Volga route at Atil or Serai; the other came south of the Caspian, via Tehran and Tabriz, whence either west to Syria, or north, again to Tbilisi. Note that these trade routes would both pass through the Caucasus on a north-south axis. East-west trade in the Caucasus was a rare occurrence indeed. As a result, trade from the Transcaucasian Euxine coast was very rare – instead, distance trade in Georgia was almost entirely overland.⁴⁶⁵

This can be seen in the surprising dearth of harbours in medieval Georgia. It is true that a certain anonymous Geographer used the phrase “Sea of the Georgians” as a name for the Euxine in the late

⁴⁶⁴ Manvelichvili, *Histoire de Géorgie*, 200.

⁴⁶⁵ *inter alia*, Valerie Hansen, *The Silk Road: A New History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), *passim*, especially maps on the unnumbered pages.

10th century, but this is certainly an exception.⁴⁶⁶ Medieval Georgia paid little heed to maritime matters. In the *Kartlis*, only one port is mentioned – Anakopia (the modern town of Akhali Atoni, ‘New Athos’). When it is discussed, however, it is not praised for its safe harbourage, or trade, but given the epithet “chief of fortresses” instead, suggesting its importance lay with respect to the land, rather than the sea.⁴⁶⁷ Similarly, though during the Georgian wars with Byzantium, at least three amphibious assaults occurred between c.1020 and 1045, on each occasion, it is the port of Anakopia that is taken by storm.⁴⁶⁸ This remained true after the period under discussion: in the seminal portolans of Pietro Vesconte of Genoa in the 1300s, when the ‘Black Sea Boom’ was in full swing, though maybe a dozen towns are listed, only four significant ports are shown on the Georgian coast: Anakopia, Pezonda, and Savastopolis, all in the northern Abkhazia region, and then, much further south, Gonio, which was frequented by the Genoese only for a brief period, and not during the time under consideration.⁴⁶⁹ Similar is a Pisan nautical guide, from the second half of the 12th century, with a list of ports running along the coast; it runs from Herakleia, to Amastris, then Trebizond, and then nothing along the Georgian coastline, or at all, until Matracha by the Sea of Azov.⁴⁷⁰

The northern region of Abkhazia, where the above-listed Georgian harbours were located, is not the fertile section of the country. Hemmed in by the Caucasus, Abkhazia’s strategic value due to its connection with the Pontic-Caspian steppe, rather than its great agricultural output. By contrast, the economic strength of Georgia lay further south – in Kartli, Tao and the Pontus regions. As a result, there was little incentive for international merchants, who were already crossing borders, to deviate

⁴⁶⁶ *Hudud al-Alam*, translated by V. Minorsky (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 53.

⁴⁶⁷ Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 308; ‘The Life of David, King of Kings’, 163.

⁴⁶⁸ Rayfield, *Edge of Empires*, 76-8. It is an interesting piece of trivia that Harald Hardrada, King of Norway who would later fall in the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066, may have been present at the last of these assaults as a Varangian Guardsman.

⁴⁶⁹ Matteo Pugliese ‘Genoa and Abkhazia: Two Centuries of Relations (1280-1475) – colonies, war and slaves’. Unpublished paper. Anakopia is modern Akhali Atonil; Pezonda is modern Pitsunda; Savastopolis is modern Sukhumi, and Gonio, now abandoned, was approximately 10 miles south of Batumi.

⁴⁷⁰ David Jacoby, ‘Byzantium, the Italian Powers, and the Black Sea before 1204’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100.2 (2007), 681.

from known and well-maintained trade routes in order to travel to non-commercial ports that merely happened to be part of the same kingdom. Instead, it would make far more sense to follow the established trade routes, taking Georgian grain with them.

As noted, these existing routes either went north, along the Caspian coast or through the Caucasus, toward the steppe; south-east, towards Tabriz and central Asia (which falls far beyond the remit of this study); or south/southwest, towards Syria or Trebizond. Given that Gonio, the only known Euxine port in southern Georgia at this time, was not substantial enough to hold a Genoese trade station for more than a few years, there were no commercial coastal outlets of significance in Georgia at this time. Instead, following the coast round, the next nearest port of any size, Trebizond, would very likely be the primary port for any Euxine trade coming out of Tbilisi or Georgia more generally. Certainly Trebizond was a predominant port in the region: Mas'ūdī (10th century) describes annual fairs at Trebizond "frequented by a large number of Muslim, Byzantine, Armenian and other merchants, without counting those who come from Kashak".⁴⁷¹ This trade was still going in the year 1205, when Ibn al-Athir records that the Sultan of Rum

blockaded [Trebizond] closely, and for that reason the routes, both by land and by sea, from Anatolia, from the Rus', the Qipjaq and others were interrupted. None of these came into [Rum] territory and the people suffered huge damage on account of that, because they used to carry on commerce with them and enter their lands ... A great host of [merchants from Syria, Iraq, Mosul, the Jazira and elsewhere] now gathered in the city of Sivas and since the road did not open, they suffered considerable harm. Fortunate indeed were those who retained their initial capital.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 129; Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, trans. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Coureille (Paris: Société Asiatique, 1962), vol 1, 160

⁴⁷² Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol. 3, 113.

According to Constantine Porphyrogenetos, these caravan routes connected the port of Trebizond with the markets “of Georgia and of Abasgia and from the whole country of Armenia”, via the city of Aranoutzin (in the modern Turkish region of Artvin), which “has an enormous revenue of the *Kommerkion* from this commerce”.⁴⁷³ Moreover, he stressed that the Georgians “always maintained friendship” with the inhabitants of Trebizond’s caravan towns, and traded with them.⁴⁷⁴ Eventually, the port of Trebizond would be brought into the Georgian fold: after King Tamar’s assault on the Sultanate of Rum, she established the Empire of Trebizond as a tributary state, taking control over what was clearly an essential maritime outlet for the Georgian kingdom.⁴⁷⁵

This allows us to offer an explanation for the apparent absence of Georgian grain from the records of Euxine trade. Firstly, all grain exported northwards, to the steppe nomads overland, or south-east, towards central Asia would ‘disappear’ from our radars; the nomads would leave no written or archaeological record of their grain purchases (if, indeed, they made any), and grain sent east would, of course, never meet the Black Sea. As for the grain that was transported west, it would arrive in Trebizond, which was not a Georgian city, to be sold by merchants who were not Georgian. Thus, for a visiting merchant, there would be no reason to assume that this was not the grain of Chaldea, Koloneia, or the other closer region which had historically exported their grain through the port of Trebizond. Unless the merchants were very forthcoming about their grain source, or their purchasers conducted forensic investigations into the origin of the grain, it is unclear how it would be apparent that the grain being sold had originated from a well-irrigated, ‘big-ploughed’, Georgian field.

This only partially solves the problem, however, as explicit mentions of exports of Trapezuntine grain are almost as scarce in the sources as are Georgian ones. When listing grain exports from Northern Anatolia, Constantine Porphyrogenetos notably omitted Chaldia, the province of Trebizond

⁴⁷³ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 215-8.

⁴⁷⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 214-5.

⁴⁷⁵ Metreveli, *Golden Age*, 154-5.

(although this does not mean that Trebizond was not included in his comments).⁴⁷⁶ However, the *Hagiography* of St Eugenios of Trebizond does mention that, during the rebellion of Bardas Phokas in the late 10th century, “the Emperor Basil had sent word ordering all the villages and towns situated on the Euxine as far as Trebizond quickly to send a load of kinds of grain by ship to the Queen of cities”. This results in “a large number of ships... [including some] both from Trebizond and the places around her” (πολὸν πλῆθος νεῶν... ἕκ τε Τραπεζοῦντος καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτήν).⁴⁷⁷ In addition, circumstantial evidence suggests such trade in such ‘invisible’ grain upon leaving Trebizond. We can quite easily attest east-west trade along the Anatolian coast between Trebizond and Constantinople. In the ninth century, *naukleri* were contracted to export grain from Paphlagonia to Constantinople in annual shipments; as we have seen, some from the island of Androte who had been so contracted were caught attempting to defraud the Emperor of his allotted grain.⁴⁷⁸ Trade along the northern coast of Anatolia, albeit of a nonspecific nature, was clearly continuing in the late 11th century; in 1091, Theodore Gabras, upon discovering that his son was to be held hostage in the capital, attempted to smuggle him back home to Trebizond: “when Gabras reached Pharus [on the Bosphorus], he seized the boy, embarked him on a merchant vessel and entrusted his son to the waves of the Euxine... [imperial ships] overtook Gabras beyond the town of Aeginus, near a town locally called Carambis [modern Fakas, a little west of Sinope]”.⁴⁷⁹ In addition, Trebizond played host to merchants from Amastris, and other Byzantines.⁴⁸⁰ A specific example of food supplies being sent to Constantinople can be found after the fall of the city in 1204, when David Komnenos of Trebizond would supply the

⁴⁷⁶ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 286-7. For the discussion of the omission of Chaldia, see page 205.

⁴⁷⁷ “ὁ γὰρ βασιλεὺς Βασίλειος ταῖς κώμαις ἀπάσιας ταῖς περὶ τὸν Εὐξεινον κόλπον διακειμέναις καὶ πόλεσι διαγράφων προσέτατε μέχρι καὶ Τραπεζοῦντος, ἵνα παντοίων σπερμάτων φόρτον διὰ νηῶν ταχέως πρὸς τὴν βασιλίδα τῶν πόλεων πέμψωσιν”. Rosenqvist, *The Hagiographical Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond*, 250-253, lines 104-110; Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 97.

⁴⁷⁸ Haldon, *The Empire That Would Not Die*, 241.

⁴⁷⁹ Komnene, *Alexiad*, ed. Beck, 256; Dawes, *The Alexiad*, 212-3.

⁴⁸⁰ Mas’ūdī, *Les Prairies d’Or*, trans. Meynard and Coureille, vol 1, 160.

Latin Empire with both grain and salted meat.⁴⁸¹ Whilst we cannot find explicit evidence for Trebizond selling grain to Constantinople prior to 1204, given both the connections between the two cities, and the substantial supply of grain available in adjacent Georgia, as well as the lack of conflicting evidence, it seems safe to accept the possibility.⁴⁸²

In addition, there appears to have been a persistent and lively trade between Trebizond and the northern reaches of the Black Sea.⁴⁸³ Connections between the Crimea and Trebizond were quite strong – for the period 1204-1223, the peninsula appears to have subject to, or a tributary of, the Empire of Trebizond, as part of its *Perateia* – ‘lands beyond the sea’.⁴⁸⁴ In 1223, merchants fleeing the Mongol conquest of Sudaq fled to Asia Minor, where they were wrecked. The Seljuqs confiscated their goods, but the Empire of Trebizond claimed that it was tribute from their subjects, and thus the confiscation was a blatantly hostile act.⁴⁸⁵ We can hypothesise trade links with the Crimea earlier, as it was not just urban and ‘civilized’ Crimeans who are connected with Trebizond; Qipjaq merchants are (we have seen) attested both by Mas’ūdī in the 10th century and Ibn al-Athir in the 13th. This is a surprising degree of consistency for a people who are not attested to have any naval capabilities themselves. It seems unlikely that they travelled around the sea overland; more likely is that there were agents who travelled between Trebizond and the Crimea or Sea of Azov. Qipjaq merchants are

⁴⁸¹ Choniates, *Historiae*, 640 l. 31. The greek phrase is a little ambiguous; the word used is σιτηγῶν, usually ‘conveying/importing grain’, but it could theoretically also be used in a more general sense of “provisions”, and thus only refer to the meat. Whilst this interpretation is possible, I find it unlikely; and even if it were the case, the fact that the ships are ‘provision-suppliers’ would nonetheless indicate that they were used at other times for transporting grain, as exclusive shipment of large quantities of salted meat could not reasonably be the default.

Teall, ‘Grain Supply’, 125; A. A. Vasiliev, ‘The Foundation of the Empire of Trebizond (1204-1222)’, *Speculum* 11.1 (1936), 24;

⁴⁸² Though, of course, this must be done with care, lest we fall into the same trap as other authors have done regarding Kievan grain and Constantinople. The difference here is the absence of conflicting evidence, compared with the complications regarding Kievan grain exports, described above.

⁴⁸³ These connections are only briefly summarised here, and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

⁴⁸⁴ Anthony Bryer, ‘A Byzantine Family: The Gabrades, c. 979-1653’, in *The Empire of Trebizond and the Pontos*, (London: Variorum, 1980), 173.

⁴⁸⁵ Bryer, ‘A Byzantine Family’, 172. The details of this event are a little obscure, as the sources differ substantially. It is discussed in more detail in chapter 3, page 192.

attested in Cherson and Sudaq from the 9th-13th centuries, by numerous sources, and always with reference to trade. The presence of Qipjaq merchants in Trebizond, therefore, further attests to links with the Crimean cities. Thus it seems reasonable that, following the loss of Anatolian grain and the resulting necessary diversification of grain sources for Cherson, that a grain-focussed link with Trebizond may have become another spoke for the Chersonite trading hub.

v. Conclusion: Loaf's Labours Lost?

The very mundanity of grain tends to obscure its importance. It leaves little in the way of physical or written evidence, and this lack of evidence poses difficulties in our attempt to draw conclusions on the state of the Euxine grain trade in the 11th-12th centuries. Unlike foreign rarities from the steppe or status-symbols and luxuries like silk, grain is simply not exciting enough to attract much attention from contemporary sources. It becomes most notable by its absence, when the population goes hungry and suddenly sources of grain become an important question. Thus, the scarcity of evidence obliges us to draw more speculative conclusions.

We can however say with some certainty that the arrival of the Seljuqs in Anatolia was correlated with a substantial reduction in grain grown in the region; though this may have been only partially due to Seljuq raids and partially due to changes in the region's climate – indeed, those same changes which had driven the Seljuqs southwards in search of new pasturelands in the first place. However, certainly the grain from Anatolia which had previously supplied many of the urban centres of the Black Sea was no longer a viable option for feeding those inhabitants, and other sources needed to be found.

Surprisingly, the Rus' do not appear to have engaged with this market; historiographical claims to the contrary are unsubstantiated. The evidence provides more questions than answers here – why the Rus' did not export their grain, despite having the supply, the demand and the means of trade, is unclear. There is the possibility of a Kiev-Cherson-Constantinople route, travelled by Chersonite merchants rather than Rus' ones, but this remains speculation. However, as of 2010, only 3% of the

territory of medieval Cherson had been excavated, so it is possible that in the future evidence may come to light allowing a review of this important possibility.⁴⁸⁶

By contrast, the Georgian agricultural miracle is a much simpler narrative. Unlike the Kiev-Constantinople trade route, the Tbilisi caravan routes and the port of Trebizond had been in use for centuries. The people may have changed, but the paths they walked had been trod by many before them. What is notable is the role of direct state intervention in this trade. The Georgian crown was exceptionally powerful; whether this was the cause of its famously rebellious nobles, a response to them, or both, is an interesting question, but beyond the current thesis. In any case, the role of the crown in both reinforcing the agricultural recovery and boosting the merchant class – culminating in the establishment of Georgian suzerainty over the important port of Trebizond – presents an interesting contrast to the relatively anarchic and independent traders of the Rus'.⁴⁸⁷ However, again, the sources are largely silent on where this grain went; we are forced to read between the lines in order to make inferences as to its destination.

⁴⁸⁶ Vera Guruleva, 'Trebizond Coins in Crimea', in *Travaux et Mémoires* 16 (2010), 406.

⁴⁸⁷ Hupchick, *The Bulgarian-Byzantine Wars*, 22.

4. Beyond the Black Sea:

Euxine Luxuries and Eurasian Trade Networks

i. Introduction

Having explored the 'local' connections between communities living on the Black Sea itself, this chapter will now focus on the Black Sea as a part of wider continental and Eurasian networks, exploring the long-distance trade routes. This chapter will examine two major routes: one to the north of the Black Sea, and the other to its south. The luxurious goods which were trafficked along these routes will be examined; the desirability and durability of such commodities causes them to be more visible in the written and archaeological record, which will allow us to assess the furthest reaches of the trade routes along which they travelled. In addition, suggestions of decline of these routes will be demonstrated to be inaccurate.

First we shall examine the northern routes, which passed largely through Cherson. These routes were dominated by Rus' merchants; however, as will be seen, they were not the only travellers. From Rus' lands came a range of commodities, with forest goods, such as amber and furs, being the most highly prized; travelling the other way along this route were Byzantine commodities, most importantly silk. The evidence left behind by such merchandise reveals a trade network stretching from Iceland to India.

Next we shall turn to the commonplace assertion that the Dnieper trade was in decline from the 11th century: that the expansion of the Qipjaq nomadic tribal confederation cut the Rus' off from the Black Sea, and thus severely hindered trade along 'the route from the Varangians to the Greeks'.⁴⁸⁸ As early

⁴⁸⁸ For example, A. Vasiliev, 'Economic Relations between Byzantium and Old Russia', *Journal of Economic and Business History* 4.2 (1932), 320; or Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, 57-8. More recently, a more critical approach to this argument has been taken; see Peter B. Golden, 'Aspects of the Nomadic Factor in the Economic Development of Kievan Rus', 65.

as 1986, it was noted by Miller that “most English language surveys [of the later Kievan Rus’]... operated on the supposition that the Dnieper River Trade Route was declining in importance”, although he did not go as far as to say such a supposition was incorrect.⁴⁸⁹ This was wise, given the dubious merit of both of the principal claims of the ‘Dnieper decline’ argument; they oversimplify aspects of these complex trade networks, and overlook crucial written and archaeological evidence. The Dnieper route remained an important vessel of trade until at least the late 12th century, which has been demonstrated in the works of both Piltz, and Franklin and Shepard.⁴⁹⁰

Next we will turn to the knot of routes which passed through Trebizond in the south of the Black Sea. Here a diverse collection of merchants bought and sold a range of goods, and travelled to and from a variety of destinations. The breadth of the city’s clientele will be explored. Then we shall turn to Jacoby’s suggestion that Trebizond lost its importance as an outlet for the ‘Silk Road’ trade network of Asia, which was redirected southwards, primarily towards Egypt.⁴⁹¹ Once again, this argument of decline will be critically examined; whilst the arrival of the Seljuqs may have caused a temporary interruption in trade, ‘decline’ is clearly too strong a word. The diversity of Trebizond’s markets prevented the loss of one trade route from significantly damaging the city’s economy. As a result the city remained a significant commercial prospect throughout our period, contributing to what Bryer referred to as the ‘modest flowering’ that defined the pre-Fall Black Sea.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁹ David B. Miller, ‘The Kievan Principality in the Century before the Mongol Invasion: An Inquiry into Recent Research and Interpretation’, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10.1 (1986): 216-7.

⁴⁹⁰ See, for example, Elisabeth Piltz, ‘Varangian Companies for Long Distance Trade – Aspects of Interchange between Scandinavia, Rus’ and Byzantium in the 11th-12th Centuries’, in *Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia – Acts of a Symposium at Uppsala University June 15-16 1996*, ed. Elisabeth Piltz (Jonsered: Paul Astroms Forlag, 1998), 85-106; Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200* (London: Longman, 1996), 324-8.

⁴⁹¹ David Jacoby, ‘Byzantine Trade with Egypt in the Mid-Tenth Century to the Fourth Crusade’, *passim*, esp. 30-31; and David Jacoby, ‘Constantinople as a Commercial Transit Center’, 195-6.

⁴⁹² Anthony Bryer, ‘Latins in the Euxine’, *XVe Congrès Internationale des études byzantines* (Athens: Association Internationale des Études Byzantines, 1979), 12. Quoted in S. P. Карпов, *История Трапезундской Империи* [‘History of the Empire of Trebizond’] (St Petersburg: Алетейя, 2007), 125. The Bryer article itself is hard to find, and I have been unable to access a copy.

ii. From Scandinavia to the Sultan: The Global Reach of the Dnieper Route

The previous chapter explored the direct connections between the Rus' and the Black Sea; now we will explore how the Rus' trade routes connected these Euxine markets to regions much further afield. In addition, we will explore the furthest reaches of Rus' luxury merchandise. As a result it will be demonstrated that there were connections between the 'Viking World' of Scandinavia, Britain, and even Iceland, via the Black Sea cities of Constantinople and Trebizond, to locations as far distant as India.

Russian Routes

There were two major trade routes which linked the Kievan Rus' with the lands to their south and east. The first ('the Volga route') followed the Volga river, reaching the Caspian Sea near the city of Atil, and thence heading south via the Caspian towards Baku and later Baghdad. This route, which had supported the bulk of Rus'-Arab trade in the 10th century, appears to have been in decline by the 11th century.⁴⁹³ The second route, often called the route 'From the Varangians to the Greeks', which, for brevity, we shall call 'the Dnieper route', is the one with which we are primarily concerned. It connected the lands of the Kievan Rus' with the Black Sea via the Dnieper and (less commonly) Dniester rivers; in addition, it stretched north from Kiev to the Baltic Sea, via the rivers Volkov, which flows into the Gulf of Finland, and Daugava, which flows into the Gulf of Riga. Such was the importance of the Dnieper for travellers that Rabbi Petachia, who began his journey in Prague, reported that "whoever wishes to undertake a distant journey repairs hither [to the mouth of the Dnieper]"⁴⁹⁴

Maintaining the distinction between the Volga and the Dnieper routes is essential to understanding the role the Black Sea played in trans-Rus' trade. If we wish to assess the importance of Euxine trade

⁴⁹³ Shepard, 'The Russian Steppe-Frontier and the Black Sea Zone', 219; Noonan, 'The Monetary History of Kiev in the Pre-Mongol Period', *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 11 (1987), 404.

⁴⁹⁴ Rabbi Petachia, *Travels of Rabbi Petachia*, 7.

to northern realms – the Kievan Rus’ and their northern neighbours in Scandinavia – we must be able to distinguish between goods brought via the Volga and Dnieper routes, as only the Dnieper connected with the Black Sea trading nexus. Any trade travelling the Volga route is not relevant for our discussion.

There is abundant evidence for Scandinavians travelling the Dnieper route through the lands of the Kievan Rus’ to Byzantine territory; and there is no more impressive body of such evidence than the collections of surviving runic inscriptions from the Viking world.⁴⁹⁵ These range from graffiti and scratched literacy practice, to much more elaborate monoliths, decorated and engraved in remembrance of the adventures of those lost far from home. In total, there are not quite 7,000 surviving runestones, runesticks and other fragments, the vast majority of which were found in Sweden. Many of these are fragmentary or offer little information beyond a name or relationship. Some, however, offer much more information:

Ástriðr had these stones raised in memory of Eysteinn, her husbandman, who attacked Jerusalem and met his end up in Greece.⁴⁹⁶

Not all who died were mercenaries or soldiers; others were merchants, and most were both:

Bótmundr and Bótreifr and Gunnvarr, they raised the stone [for one who]... sat in the south with the skins (= *traded fur*). And he met his end at Ulfshala.⁴⁹⁷

And there were some who simply hoped for the taste of adventure:

⁴⁹⁵ I have used the Scandinavian Runic-Text database, available at <https://rundata.info/> [=SRTD]. Unless otherwise attributed, translations and dating are as supplied by the database. Despite the name, not all of the runes included in this database are Scandinavian; there are approximately 100 in Greenland; 150 in Britain; 50 in Iceland, and 6 in (the rest of) Europe – Istanbul (2), Venice, Athens, Utrecht and Le Mans. Statistics, when used, will ignore these last 6 as anomalous.

⁴⁹⁶ SRTD, US136.

⁴⁹⁷ SRTD, G207.

Ingirún, Harðr's daughter, had the runes carved in memory of herself. She wants to travel to the east and abroad to Jerusalem. Fótr carved the runes.⁴⁹⁸

We must bear in mind some difficulties in using runestones as a representative source for typical Viking activities. They preserve the names largely of the wealthy: carving runes was a rare skill, hence why the names of the carvers are often included, like an artist's signature. Many of these stones we can see were carved by the same runesmiths. In addition, runestones have an inverted 'survivorship bias' – they largely record those who died away from home; by ignoring those who survived, the stones may give an unfair impression of the risks of these travels. Nonetheless, Ingirún certainly felt the risk of travelling eastwards was enough to set up her own epitaph before travelling (although perhaps she never intended to return home in any event). And finally, there is the difficulty of interpreting the runes themselves. The stones are often fragmented, often faded, and often afford competing readings. Nowhere is this more apparent than stone SO 130, which is given the reading: "He (?) fell (?) in (?) Garðar(?)".⁴⁹⁹ Therefore, whilst the runes can provide interesting information about the existence of trans-Rus' trade, they represent a complex source-material, and must be used with a degree of caution.

Westerly Routes

Nonetheless, the information we can garner from these runestones is intriguing, not least for the abundant evidence of connections between Scandinavia and the Black Sea. Shepard notes that the names of 'Greece' or 'the Greeks' ("Grikland" and "Grikkjar"; 27) appear more commonly on runestones than that of any other place or people, even neighbouring Russia ("Garðar", only 8).⁵⁰⁰ We must be wary of reading too much into such statistics; as noted above, this could be representative of

⁴⁹⁸ *SRTD*, U605.

⁴⁹⁹ *SRTD*, SO130.

⁵⁰⁰ Shepard says 27 runestones mention Greece/Greek; Rundra.info contains 30. Shepard counts stones from "Norway, Sweden and Gotland", which would include all 30 of these. It is not clear which 3 he omitted, and whether intentionally or otherwise. Jonathan Shepard, 'Yngvarr's Expedition to the East and a Russian Inscribed Stone Cross', *Saga-Book* 21 (1985), 230. The count of 'Russian' stones is my own, from the *SRTD*.

the greater dangers in travel to Greece relative to Russia, or alternatively the higher status or wealth of the travellers to Greece. Certainly the stones associate Greece with riches:

Kárr had this stone raised in memory of Haurisi(?) his father.... he travelled competently; earned wealth abroad in Greece for his heir.⁵⁰¹

Whether socially biased or no, these stones indicate a well-established connection between Scandinavia and 'Greece'. This connection is further supported when you consider the mentions of locations on the route to Greece, rather than just Greece itself: by Shepard's count, 44 stones mention "the East (way)"; not all of these would necessarily be connected with the Black Sea, but it seems reasonable that a good portion of them were. Moreover, a further 14 engravings refer to specific points on the route to Constantinople: Russia (i.e. the land of the Rus'), Novgorod, the Dnieper rapids of Aifur and the nearby Rufstainn, and Vitichev, a town some way south of Kiev.⁵⁰² These stones are corroborated by a remark in Adam of Bremen's history, which states that Scandinavians "customarily sailed" to Greece in the late 11th century.⁵⁰³

Dating the inscriptions in detail is difficult; often we can only judge based on general artistic trends, which cannot offer a precise chronology. Nonetheless, many of these stones appear to belong to somewhere in the 11th and 12th centuries. The latest reasonably precise date for an engraving mentioning a journey to the Black Sea is c.1150, the latest date at which Hróðvísl and Hróðelfr could have been betrayed by Wallachians in the Balkans, as recorded in stone G 134. However, the many

⁵⁰¹ *SRTD*, U792.

⁵⁰² Shepard, 'Yngvarr's Expedition to the East', 230. According to the *SRTB*, the following stones refer to: Russia – Ö128, Sö130, Sö148, Sö338, U209, U636, N62; Novgorod – Sö171, U687, U1003, G220; Aifur and Rufstainn – G280; Vitichev – N62. This makes 13 stones; which is Shepard's 14th, is unclear. Possibly it is G134, which refers to "Balkumenn", 'Wallachians', although he does not specify this in the text.

⁵⁰³ Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte* (Hannover, Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1917), 243; Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 197; Shepard, 'Yngvarr's Expedition to the East', 230. The Latin phrase is "dirigi solent".

undated stones may belong to even later periods: another Norwegian stone refers to a traveller to Rome c. 1198, allowing for the possibility that our 'Greek' engravings run up until the 13th century.⁵⁰⁴

A further complication in assessing these Greek stones is the lack of detail as to the purpose of the journeys commemorated – whether military or commercial.⁵⁰⁵ Many of those remembered simply “died in the east”, or similar phrases. However, others are more explicit. Some clearly refer to soldiers, such as:

Ragnvaldr had the runes carved in memory of Fastvé, his mother, ... (Ragnvaldr) was in Greece, was commander of the retinue.⁵⁰⁶

Others clearly commemorate mercantile, rather than military, voyages:

Þryðríkr (raised) the stone in memory of his sons, able and valiant men.
Óleifr/Gulleifr travelled to Greece, divided (up) gold.⁵⁰⁷

and:

Ljótr the captain erected this stone in memory of his sons. He who perished abroad was called Áki. (He) steered a cargo-ship; he came to Greek harbours; Hefnir died at home...⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁴ *SRTD* G134, & N607.

⁵⁰⁵ This is, to an extent, an anachronistic distinction. Most of those travelling would likely identify as neither merchants nor warriors, but rather individuals who engaged in martial or mercantile activities as the situation provided. Nonetheless, primarily commercial voyages would require different preparations to primarily military ones, so the distinction is not wholly arbitrary.

A further possibility is journeys of diplomatic purpose. These would concern us not only because of the commercial ramifications of any diplomatic agreements which may result, but also because of the use of merchants in transporting and accompanying the embassies. For example, in *De Ceremoniis*, merchants are recorded as having accompanied Olga on her visit to Constantinople in the mid-tenth century, even being present for ceremonial state occasions, despite being distinct from both the archons and emissaries. Similarly, Byzantine embassies to Egypt at around the same time were accompanied by merchants (or merchants were accompanied by embassies); however, the context is slightly different. Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, 592-5; Jacoby, 'Byzantine Trade with Egypt', 34.

⁵⁰⁶ *SRTB*, U112.

⁵⁰⁷ *SRTB*, SO163.

⁵⁰⁸ *SRTB*, U1016.

We must also consider what is meant by 'Greece', a somewhat imprecise term. Certainly this included Constantinople (or Miklagarðr, as it would have been known to the Varangians), especially for those who travelled to 'Greece' for military service. This use of 'Greece' for the Byzantine Empire as a larger entity (rather than our narrower, modern understanding of 'Greece') is attested by Adam of Bremen in the late 11th century: "the largest city of Russia is Kiev, rival of the Sceptre of Constantinople, the brightest ornament of Greece".⁵⁰⁹

A further question to consider is whether or not Rus' merchants travelled beyond Constantinople. This possibility seems unlikely. Vryonis claimed to have identified a Russian merchant in attendance at a fair in Ephesus in the 11th century, mentioned in the hagiography of St. Lazaros of Mount Galesion. However, his citation does not indicate such a merchant, and I cannot locate a Russian anywhere else in the text.⁵¹⁰ Similarly, among the 54 nations which, according to Benjamin of Tudela, traded in Alexandria, "each [of which] has an inn of its own", Russia is included.⁵¹¹ Whilst it is perhaps possible that Rus' merchants went as far as Alexandria, Tudela's passage seems hyperbolic and unreliable, and requires corroboration before it can be accepted.

There is scant other evidence for Rus' or Varangians travelling further south than Constantinople. Skylitzes records an episode c.1011 where a company of Russian soldiers, having refused to lay down arms in order to enter Constantinople, sailed through the Propontis, reaching Abydos at the mouth of

⁵⁰⁹ Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, 80; Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 67.

⁵¹⁰ Vryonis also mentions the presence of Saracens, Jews and Georgians, which I have been able to find; the Georgian visitor is not only a monk, but is also travelling from Palestine to Constantinople; therefore his presence in Ephesus, therefore, is sadly not indicative of commercial links between that town and Georgia. Charles De Smedt et al., *Acta Sanctorum Novembris Tomi III* (Brussels: Bollandist Society, 1910), 515-6, 524, 542; Richard P.H. Greenfield, ed, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh-century Pillar Saint* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Press, 2000), 135-6, 203; Speros Vryonis, Jr, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamisation from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), 10.

It is possible Vryonis was mistaken about the Russian; his interpretation of the text in other matters has been questioned by Clive Foss, *Ephesus After Antiquity: a late antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 120n17.

⁵¹¹ Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 76.

the Aegean, and eventually being slaughtered at Lemnos.⁵¹² There is absolutely no suggestion, however, that this expedition had any mercantile aspect. Another potential source for Rus' beyond Constantinople is the intriguing runestone Sö 65, dated to the early 11th century, which reads:

Inga raised this stone in memory of Óleifr... He ploughed his stern to the east, and
met his end in the land of the Lombards.⁵¹³

Similarly, stone Sö Fv1954;22 mentions a traveller who 'met his end' after travelling to (probably) Lombardy via the 'Eastern Route'.⁵¹⁴ This is intriguing information; however, we should note that neither stone provides details on the reason for the voyages, which could as well have been military service as for commercial pursuits. Indeed, military service would fit well with the somewhat circuitous route described, as any military service under Byzantine banners would begin for a Varangian in Constantinople.

Other evidence indicates that Rus' or Scandinavian merchants did not often travel into Aegean waters. The 10th-century treaties recorded in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* focus only on Constantinople, where the merchants were given room, board and (both excitingly, and probably necessarily) baths.⁵¹⁵ There is no record of them being afforded such favourable treatment in other Byzantine cities. Meanwhile, the twelfth-century dialogue *Timarion* describes the grand fairs at Thessalonica, which hosted:

...men of every conceivable race and country. Greeks from wherever they happen
to live, the entire motley crew of Mysians [*Bulgarians*] who are our neighbours as

⁵¹²John Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. by H. Thurn (Berlin: *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae* 5, 1973), 369-70; John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History*, translated by John Wortley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 347.

⁵¹³ *SRTB*, Sö65.

⁵¹⁴ *SRTB*, Sö Fv1954;22. The fragmentary nature of this stone makes it more difficult to date than Sö65, which can be dated on palaeographic/artistic grounds.

⁵¹⁵ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 75.

far as the Danube and Scythia, Campanians, Italians in general, Iberians, Lusitanians and Transalpine Celts.⁵¹⁶

Given the attempt to describe the cosmopolitan *mélange* of peoples in Thessalonica here, the absence of Rus' or other northern peoples is notable. This does not appear to be an oversight, given the later description of goods at these fairs. The eponymous hero saw:

...all kinds of men's and women's clothes both woven and spun, everything that comes from Boeotia and the Peloponnese, and all the things that merchant ships bring from Italy and Greece. Phoenicia also supplies many goods, as do Egypt, Spain and the Pillars of Hercules, where the finest altar cloths are made. These items the merchants export directly from their respective countries to old Macedonia and Thessalonica. The Black Sea also contributes to the fair by sending across its own products to Constantinople, from where they are conveyed by large numbers of horses and mules.⁵¹⁷

Northern goods may well have been present at the fair, though unmentioned; however, the clear statement of overland travel plainly implies that the sea-borne Rus' and Scandinavians were not. Thus, assuming that Vryonis was mistaken regarding the Ephesian hagiography, we are left lacking concrete evidence that Rus' merchants travelled beyond Constantinople.

⁵¹⁶ *Timarion, Translated with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Barry Baldwin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 44.

The use of the term "Iberians" here is confusing. It could refer to either to inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula (Modern Spain/Portugal), or to the inhabitants of Caucasian Iberia (a region of Eastern Georgia. Baldwin leans towards the former interpretation. Porphyrogenetos notes the possibility for confusion even in his own time: "There are two Iberias; one at the Pillars of Hercules... the other over towards the Persians." Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 98-101.

⁵¹⁷ *Timarion*, trans. Baldwin, 45.

Easterly Routes

There is greater evidence for connections between Scandinavia and the regions south and east of the Black Sea. In particular, there is the ‘Serkland’ enigma. The region of ‘Serkland’ appears on several runestones, perhaps most distinctively (and tersely) on the late-11th century Timans Whetstone:

Ormika, Ulfhvatr(?), Greece, Jerusalem, Iceland, Serkland.⁵¹⁸

Despite the lack of contextual information, or indeed sentence structure, this stone is believed to commemorate the wide-ranging travels of Ormika and Ulfhvatr.⁵¹⁹ It is fascinating to note that these two individuals reached both extremities of Europe at such an early era. Also noteworthy is the presence of ‘Serkland’. The traditional interpretation of Serkland is ‘land of the Saracens’, i.e. the Arab World.

However, this is not the only interpretation. Serkland often (26 out of the total 28 occurrences) appears on stones commemorating those who died while on an expedition with Yngvar, an expedition which is also commemorated in the *Yngvars saga víðförla*: the Saga of Yngvar the Far-Travelled. This expedition appears to have included a mercantile component, which is indicative of a continued connection between the Rus’ and the Silk Road in the 11th century via the Volga (not Dnieper) route. As a result, this *Saga* is worth examining in more detail.

The worth of the *Yngvar Saga* as a historical source is questionable. To make that abundantly clear, we need only note that at one stage, Yngvar and his company use the salted foot, which was amputated from a giant, in order to outwit a dragon – and that this bamboozled dragon is far from the only one mentioned in the saga.⁵²⁰ However, we should not disregard the *Yngvar Saga* entirely.

⁵¹⁸ *SRTB*, G216.

⁵¹⁹ Elisabeth Piltz, ‘Varangian Companies for Long Distance Trade’, 87.

⁵²⁰ Oddr Snorrason, *Yngvars saga víðförla* [‘The Saga of Yngvar the Traveller’], trans. Peter Tunstall, lasted modified July 26, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110726051430/http://www.oe.eclipse.co.uk/nom/Yngvar.htm>. §6.

Mixed in with Yngvar's more fanciful adventures are several corroborated facts. Firstly, we have the person of Yngvar himself, attested on those many runestones, and whose death is recorded at the same date of 1041 in at least two historical annals (the *Konungsannáll* and *Lögmansannáll*).⁵²¹ Shepard also notes the correlation between the cause of death as described on the Yngvar stones (all but two "die" or "perish", rather than are killed in battle), and the somewhat anti-climactic and unheroic conclusion to Yngvar's expedition in the *Saga*, where he succumbs to illness.⁵²² It is also possible to take a forgiving interpretation of the following extract of Adam of Bremen:

The Swedes, who had expelled their bishop, were in the meantime pursued by divine vengeance. First, indeed, when one of the king's sons, named Anund, was sent by his father to extend his dominions, he came to the land of the women, who we think were Amazons, and he as well as his army perished there of poison which the women mingled in the springs.⁵²³

The name Anund may have been transposed from Anund Jacob, the King of Sweden at the time; and the inclusion of poison may simply have resulted from attributing motive to the motiveless reaping of disease. As to "the land of the women, who we think were Amazons", if we wished to corroborate this with the *Saga*, then we could draw comparisons either with the realm ruled by Queen Silkisif, in §5 ('Of Yngvar's Expedition'), or the mysterious heathen women who disrupt the expedition in §7 ('Of Yngvar and King Jolf').⁵²⁴ Such a connection is, of course, rather tenuous; it is more likely that, as with the dragons, the Amazons require no factual explanation.

Regardless of dragons, giants or any other cryptozoological entities, there is nonetheless some historical value to the *Saga*. Some of the events described within appear to be factual, and are

⁵²¹ Shepard, 'Yngvar's Expedition to the East', 255-6.

⁵²² Shepard, 'Yngvar's Expedition to the East', 246-7.

⁵²³ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg Bremen*, 126-7.

⁵²⁴ Snorrason, *Yngvars saga*, §5 & 7.

corroborated by other sources. What interests us here is Yngvar's destination – 'Serkland'. Conventionally, this is interpreted as 'Land of the Saracens', often meaning the regions south of the Caspian Sea. However, there are alternative explanations. Mel'nikova connects *Serk-* not with 'Saracen', but with 'sericum', meaning 'silk', thus making Serkland the eastern, silk-producing regions. Alternative interpretations which have been suggested include connections with '*serkr*', meaning gown, or Sarkel, a city of the Khazars.⁵²⁵

Notably, the Serkland of *Yngvar's Saga* is as consistent (if not more so) with Georgia than with 'traditional' Serkland. Firstly, there is the purported conversion of the "idolatrous" inhabitants of the realm of Queen Silkisif to Christianity.⁵²⁶ This would be an unlikely inclusion if Yngvar had travelled to an Islamic realm, as Yngvar could hardly claim credit for converting those who had not in fact been converted; however, attributing the existence of Christianity in Georgia to the pious Yngvar seems a more likely addition to the narrative. Larsson also notes significant similarities between the route described in the *Saga* and both the direction and geography ("narrow gorges", "high crags") of the route to Georgia, via the Rioni.⁵²⁷ Larsson's most contentious claim relies upon a significant redating of the Battle of Sasireti, from the conventional date of c. 1045 to the significantly earlier 1041. This he does based on chronological anomalies in the *Kartlis*; as a result, he argues that the Varangian contingent of Sasireti was, in part if not in whole, composed of Yngvar's expedition, recounted in the *Saga* as the battles involving Júlfr and Biólfr.⁵²⁸ Shepard criticises this argument, citing inconsistencies in the *Saga* which could not fit with this interpretation; however, Larsson notes that it is necessary to analyse the *Saga* critically, and demanding that "that the saga should give an *exact* description of the Georgian conditions... cannot be expected."⁵²⁹ He further notes that Shepard's counter-proposal requires an additional Varangian expedition in the same region at the same time achieving similar

⁵²⁵ Shepard, 'Yngvar's Expedition to the East', 234-5.

⁵²⁶ Snorrason, *Yngvars saga*, §5.

⁵²⁷ Mats G. Larsson, 'Yngvar's Expedition and the Georgian Chronicle', *Saga-Book* 22 (1989), 105.

⁵²⁸ Larsson, 'Yngvar's Expedition', 98ff.

⁵²⁹ Larsson, 'Yngvar's Expedition', 103.

results, but otherwise leaving no material evidence behind *other* than scant details in *Yngvar's Saga*.⁵³⁰

It seems both to Larsson and to me that 'entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity', leaving Shepard's proposal somewhat dubious.

There are many nuances in the arguments surrounding the chronology of the *Georgian Chronicle*, and the reliability of the *Yngvar Saga*, which depend upon precise linguistic understanding of Georgian and Icelandic, and cannot be properly explored in translation; thus I will not over-reach, and instead limit my argument to stating that the events described in the *Yngvar Saga*, in so far as they reflect reality, reflect a reality which took place in Georgia, and thus that "Serkland" reflects not only the lands of the Saracens, but must also include the Caucasus.

With this in mind, we can now return to the potential commercial aspect of Yngvar's expedition. Stone U 654 has the following inscription:

Andvéttr and Kárr and <Kiti> and Blesi and Djarfr raised this stone in memory of
Gunnleifr, their father, who was killed in the east with Yngvar. May God help their
spirits. Alríkr(?), I carved the runes. He could steer a cargo-ship well.⁵³¹

There are two points of note here. First is the inclusion of cargo-ship: *knarr*, specifically a merchant-ship. Whilst it does not explicitly say that Gunnleifr sailed a *knarr* on Yngvar's expedition specifically, this is nonetheless the most likely possibility. Certainly one of the most noteworthy aspects of Gunnleifr's life was his maritime and mercantile journeys. A counter-argument would be that this is one of the few Yngvar stones which directly states someone was killed ("dreppinn"), rather than simply "died"; this is likely indicative of the fact that Gunnleifr was one of Yngvar's men who died in combat, rather than from disease. This, naturally, does not preclude Gunnleifr from being a merchant;

⁵³⁰ Larsson, 'Yngvar's Expedition', 102-3.

⁵³¹ *SRTD*, U654.

often the roles of merchant and warrior overlapped.⁵³² Unfortunately, Alrikr's inscription is enigmatic, and affords competing interpretations as to the involvement of merchants in Yngvar's expedition. In either event, Yngvar's expedition, if it reached Georgia, does not appear to have travelled there via the Dnieper route and the Black Sea, but rather via the Volga Route and (likely) the Caspian Sea. A Euxine journey has been posited by some interpreters of the *Saga*; however, the evidence for such a journey is unconvincing. It is true that there is a description of Greek Fire:

But when they saw what they were up against, they began pumping with bellows into the furnace where the fire was, and a great roar came forth. There was also a bronze tube there, and a great jet of fire poured out of it, hitting one of [Yngvar's] ships, and in a short time it all burnt to ashes.⁵³³

However, the description of such an apparatus could simply be an interpolation by the author; it does not necessarily mean that Yngvar and his men had entered Byzantine waters. Similarly, that Valdimar's ship, after departing from the rest of the expedition, ended up in Constantinople, does not necessarily mean that the rest of the expedition was on the Black Sea.⁵³⁴ Shepard attempts to link Yngvar's expedition with Tmutarakan. However, he could only concretely connect that town with Rus' activities in the Caucasus in 1030s; links with the Yngvar's later exploits remained uncertain.⁵³⁵ On the other hand, if we are to take the *Saga's* geography as even generically accurate, Yngvar's expedition was fluvially-based, and did not reach any sea until after leaving the court of King Jolf, when he eventually arrives at "the Red Sea".⁵³⁶ Had Yngvar travelled via the Black Sea, we would have expected sea-travel, rather than river-travel, to have been mentioned earlier in the saga.

⁵³² See, for example, Constantine Porphyrogenetos' description of Rus' warrior-merchants travelling down the Dnieper, Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 56-9.

⁵³³ Snorrason, *Yngvars saga*, §5&6

⁵³⁴ Snorrason, *Yngvars saga*, §8.

⁵³⁵ Shepard, 'Yngvar's Expedition to the East', 248-253.

⁵³⁶ Snorrason, *Yngvars saga*, §7.

This all suggests that, whether Yngvar went to Georgia and the Caucasus, or to the more 'traditional' Serkland to the south of the Caspian Sea, he did not go via the Dnieper route, but rather by some variation of the Volga route. Thus, although it may have declined in importance relative to the Dnieper route, the Volga route nonetheless remained in use as late as c.1041, meaning that Rus' and Scandinavian access to Silk Road goods did not necessarily depend on the Black Sea outlets of Trebizond.

Northerly Routes

Finally, we must consider the Byzantine counterpart to these journeys: whether the Dnieper route was not just Northmen travelling to Greece, but also Greeks travelling to the North. There is some evidence for this. We know that Greek merchants travelled from Constantinople to the northern reaches of the Black Sea, in search of caviar. There was a significant market for this in the metropolis: Eustathios of Thessalonica noted that, for Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, "there was no shortage of caviar either, of both types: one, the red shiny one... then the black one, from the northern counties (among other tradeports) and also from the Don, which flows into the Black Sea."⁵³⁷ The poet Ptochoprodromos mentions that some merchants specialised exclusively in the gathering and sale of caviar.⁵³⁸ We also know that merchants travelled from Cherson to the lands of the Rus' as early as the 10th century, as attested by a comment from Constantine Porphyrogenetos' *De Administrando*: "the seventh barrage, called in Russian *Stroukoun*, and in Slavonic *Naprezi*, which means "Little Barrage"... this [the Rus'] pass at the so-called ford of *Vrar*, where the Chersonites cross over from Russia". It is intriguing to note that the Chersonites are returning home from (ἀπὸ), rather than travelling to Russia, but this may not be anything more than an unusual idiom.⁵³⁹ The epic, *The Lay of the Host of Igor*, has

⁵³⁷ Eustathios of Thessalonica, *De Emendanda Vita Monachia*, 80-81

⁵³⁸ Ptochoprodromos, Poem IV, in *Ptochoprodromos*, ed. and trans. H. Eideneier, 144-157; David Jacoby, 'Caviar Trading in Byzantium', in *Mare et Litora: essays presented to Sergei Karpov for his 60th Birthday*, ed. Rustam Shukurov (Moscow: Indrik, 2009), 350-1.

⁵³⁹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 60-61; Piltz, 'Varangian Companies for Long Distance Trade', 88. It is interesting to note that Scandinavian sources confirm the accuracy of at least one of

Greeks in Kiev c. 1185, although whether they are merchants or just far-flung travellers of some other sort is not specified.⁵⁴⁰ Similarly, the *Paterik* of the Kievan Cave Monastery records on several occasions the arrival of Greek or Constantinopolitan merchants and craftsmen; one example being the 1080s contingent of iconographers who visited Kiev accompanied by Greek merchants; another being a painter called Alimpii who learned his trade from Greeks in Kiev.⁵⁴¹

The evidence is less forthcoming about whether Greek merchants travelled further north, beyond the realm of the Kievan Rus'. One of the stronger pieces of evidence of such adventurers is a seal belonging to a certain Kosmas, found at Sigtuna in Sweden, which has been posited as belonging to a silk merchant, although it is equally possible that it belonged to a priest; moreover, even if it had belonged to a Greek merchant, that does not necessarily imply that he made the journey to Sigtuna, as it could just as easily have been carried by one of his customers.⁵⁴² A more dubious piece of evidence is the life of St. Antony of Rome, who sailed from Italy on a storm-cast stone for two days before arriving on a distant shore. Unable to speak the language of the locals, he fortunately came across a Greek merchant, who informed the saint that they were in Novgorod. He would become bishop of the city, and died in 1147. However, the hagiography of St. Antony which contains the account of this rocky journey would already be a doubtful source of evidence; that the manuscript tradition only goes back to the 16th century, highlights its dubiousness.⁵⁴³

Porphyrogenetos' names for the rapids of the Dnieper— "Aifur" is also named, on a stone from Gotland, as mentioned above.

⁵⁴⁰ Martin, 'The First Venetians in the Black Sea', 113. The difficulties on using the *Lay* as a source are discussed above, on page 101.

⁵⁴¹ *Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, 11; Noonan, 'Rus', Pechenegs, and Polovtsy: Economic interaction along the steppe frontier in the pre-Mongol era', *Russian History* 19 (1992), 312; Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 280.

⁵⁴² Rune Edberg, 'Vem Var Kosmas? Två bysantinska sigill från Sigtunas vikingatida hamn' ['Who was Kosmas? Two Byzantine seals from Sigtuna's Viking harbour'], in *Vikingars guld ur Mälarens Djup: tio artiklar med anledning av en utställning*, edited by Sten Tesch and Rune Edberg (Sigtuna: Sigtuna Museer, 1999), 24. This seal will be discussed further below.

⁵⁴³ It is worth noting that the merchant in question was not a 'native' Byzantine, but rather a Hellenized Goth from the Crimea. Vasiliev, 'Economic Relations between Byzantium and Old Russia', 326; 'Антоний Римлянин' ['Antony the Roman'], *Orthodox Encyclopaedia*, last modified November 26, 2008, <http://www.pravenc.ru/text/116106.html>.

The most concrete evidence which we have for Greeks in the North comes from Adam of Bremen, who, writing some time before 1080, said of the town Jumne (near modern Wollin in Poland):

A most noble city [which] affords a very widely known trading centre for barbarians and Greeks who live round about... it is truly the largest of all the cities in Europe, and there live in it many other people, Greeks and barbarians... rich in all the wares of the northern nations, that city lacks nothing that is either pleasing or rare.⁵⁴⁴

We may be cynical of the accuracy of his details, which even the author accepted were “scarcely credible”, but archaeological finds suggest the existence of a substantial trading centre in the region of Wollin, supporting Bremen’s claim.⁵⁴⁵ Who the Greeks in Jumne were – Chersonite, Byzantines ‘proper’ or even non-existent – is unclear. However, it certainly presents an intriguing counterpoint to the commonplace notion that Byzantines did not engage in long-distance mercantile pursuits.

Thus, the connections between Scandinavia and the Black Sea were well served by the Dnieper route. Many Scandinavian merchant-adventurers plied this route, heading down the river network to the markets of Cherson and Constantinople. Whilst they may also have travelled to Georgia and the Caucasus, under the guise of ‘Serkland’, this travel appears to have gone at least partially via the Volga route, and not through the Black Sea and Trebizond. Their Greek counterparts, whilst apparently fewer

⁵⁴⁴ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 66-7.

⁵⁴⁵ Of particular interest is Bremen’s claim, following the above quote, that “There is *Olla Vulcani*, which the inhabitants call ‘Greek fire’ and of which Solinus also makes mention.” This has previously been interpreted creatively, as a garbled description of a lighthouse. However, given the context, discussing rare commodities, I see no reason why it cannot be interpreted literally, as ‘Vulcan’s Pots’; after all, Solinus does indeed make mention of “oil they call ‘Medicum’”. When this is set on fire, if you eagerly cover it with water, it blazes up all the more; it cannot be put out by anything other than by casting sand on it.”; Schmeidler’s critical edition of Bremen’s work overlooks this extract of Solinus, since it does not contain either of Bremen’s phrases *verbatim*. If Bremen is indeed describing naphtha for sale, it would not necessarily have to have been imported by Bremen’s Greeks. Wollin is not far from the modern Barnówko-Mostno-Buszewo oil field, in the same Polish voivodeship; it is perfectly possible in medieval times that some oil was available without industrialised techniques.

Solinus, *Polyhistor*, trans. Arwen Apps, § 21.4, <https://topostext.org/work/747>; Solinus, *Polyhistor*, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/solinus5.html>; Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Bernhard Schmeidler (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1917), 79; Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 66 & n67.

in number, also appear to have travelled the Dnieper route, reaching as far north as the Baltic coast, though these may have been Chersonites, rather than Constantinopolitans.

Dnieper Merchandise

Having established the extent of the involvement of the Rus' northern neighbours in Black Sea trade, we can now examine the range of commodities which travelled between the Euxine and Baltic seas. The goods that travelled southwards along the Dnieper route varied considerably in nature - amber, honey and wax, and furs of many kinds are all attested, as is the distinctive pink-purple slate mined at Ovruch, near Kiev, which serves as somewhat of a fingerprint for Rus' merchants.⁵⁴⁶ In addition, according to Ibn Khordadbeh, the Rus' also exported swords.⁵⁴⁷ This claim is not quite unique; the *Hudud al-Alam* also states that "Kuyuba [Kiev?] produces valuable swords" and "Urtab [another Rus' town of unclear location, possibly Mordovian] produces very valuable blades and swords which can be bent in two, but as soon as the hand is removed they return to their former state".⁵⁴⁸ The less fanciful aspects of these claims have been corroborated by an archaeological find: a collection of five unused swords found together in the Dnieper. These swords, datable to the late 10th or early 11th century, were found near one of the rapids identified by Constantine Porphyrogenetos as a location where the Rus' were particularly vulnerable to Pecheneg raids.⁵⁴⁹ It thus seems tempting to believe

⁵⁴⁶ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 77, 82-3, 86; Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia*, 101 & 117; Defrémery, 'Fragments Géographes et d'historiens Arabes et Persans', 471-2; Serjeant, 'Material for a History of Islamic Textiles', 15, 74 & 84; Rabinowitz, Sedikova and Henneberg, 'Daily Life in a Provincial Late Byzantine City', 444.

⁵⁴⁷ Serjeant, 'Material for a History of Islamic Textiles', 15, 84.

The slate referred to is the rather unique 'pink slate', found in Ovruch near Kiev. This was primarily a good sold in domestic markets, and most commonly used to make spindle-whorls; however, the presence of these spindle whorls in Cherson suggests there was some export of these goods. They may have had status-value and/or doubled as a substitute for currency. Rabinowitz, Sedikova and Henneberg, 'Daily life in a Provincial late Byzantine City', 452; Simon Franklin, *Writing, Society and Culture in Early Rus, c. 950-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79.

⁵⁴⁸ *Hudud al-Alam*, 159 & 432-3.

⁵⁴⁹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 60-61.

that these swords were lost, possibly in violent circumstances, while on their way to the marketplace of Constantinople to be sold.⁵⁵⁰

Another important commodity shipped by the Rus' was slaves. The importance of this trade to Rus'-Byzantine commerce is manifest in the written sources. The only commodity which Constantine Porphyrogenetos specifically names in his account of Rus' merchants is slaves.⁵⁵¹ In addition, they are given specific clauses in both the 911 and 944 Rus'-Byzantine treaties as recorded in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* – and are the only Russian commodity which is so specified.⁵⁵² Shepard suggests that the export of slaves was the “primary” reason for the Rus' making the journey southwards along the Dnieper, and that Rus'-Byzantine trade was “primarily” a slave trade.⁵⁵³ Whether or not one finds this suggestion convincing, there is no denying that slaves formed an important part of the Dnieper trading economy.

The Rus' had competitors in this trade in human chattel. The Pechenegs appear to have been capturing both Rus' and Byzantines in order to sell them into slavery.⁵⁵⁴ Noonan credits them as “pioneers”, the first to exploit the rich potential of the northern Black Sea as a slave market, a trade which would continue for centuries; this he attributes to the fact that Rus' captives could not sensibly be employed by Pechenegs and Qipjaqs, and therefore were exported through the Black Sea to destinations further away.⁵⁵⁵ In addition, there are accounts of Jewish merchants, selling slaves, who travelled via Cherson. The *Paterik* records the story of Blessed Evstratij the Faster, who died in 1097 at Cherson in the following circumstances: purportedly, 50 prisoners of war, captured by the “godless Hagarenes” (likely

⁵⁵⁰ Shepard, 'The Russian Steppe-Frontier and the Black Sea Zone', 219.

⁵⁵¹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 60-61.

⁵⁵² *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 68 & 75.

⁵⁵³ Shepard, 'Constantinople: Gateway to the North', 246. However, we should take treat this suggestion with care; elsewhere, Shepard argues (with Franklin) that, given its prominence in the Russo-Byzantine treaties, it was silk which was the high-value good which made the hazardous voyage to Constantinople worthwhile. Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 141-2.

⁵⁵⁴ Shepard, 'The Russian Steppe-Frontier and the Black Sea Zone', 221.

⁵⁵⁵ Thomas S. Noonan, 'Rus', Pechenegs and Polovtsy', 315 & 317; *Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, 123-5.

Qipjaqs) were taken by a Jew to Cherson, where all died of hunger and thirst, except Evstratij (whose fasting had prepared him for such deprivations). He was then crucified for 15 days, and was finally stabbed by a spear after prophesying that his captors would be called to account for their actions. That very same day, the Emperor intervened in the Jewish trafficking of Christian slaves; Evstratij's captor was hanged, other Jewish slave-merchants killed, and local Jews baptised.⁵⁵⁶ Whilst the details of the event are almost surely false (why would the Chersonites have tolerated the 15-day crucifixion of a holy man in their town square?), the framework – i.e. the presence of Jewish merchants selling slaves in or near Cherson – appears realistic; it chimes well with Ibn Khordadbeh's account of the Radhanite merchants, who travelled “to the rear of Rome, via the land of the Slavs, reaching the capital of the Khazars” and then sailed the Caspian Sea to Afghanistan and thence China. Among their many goods included in Khordadbeh's account are “eunuchs and young slaves of both sexes”, and they speak Greek.⁵⁵⁷ Their route would surely have taken them either across the northern coastlands of the Black Sea, or possibly sailing along its shores. These slaves would probably have been Slavs or Bulgars, and intended for Middle Eastern rather than Byzantine markets; however, there was no reason a Radhanite merchant could not have found a paying customer in Byzantine Crimea along his journey.⁵⁵⁸ However, while they were both present in Rus' territory and Byzantine Crimea, there is no evidence that the Pechenegs nor the Radhanites headed south to Constantinople or north to Kiev to sell their human chattels; that longitudinal route was apparently the preserve of Rus, Scandinavian and Greek merchants.

Rivalling slaves as the most sought-after goods available from the north of the Black Sea were the 'forest products': furs and amber.⁵⁵⁹ It is by tracking these products that we can put the Black Sea in a

⁵⁵⁶ Vasiliev, 'Economic Relations between Byzantium and Old Russia', 327; Michael Toch, 'Was there a Jewish Slave Trade (or commercial monopoly) in the early middle ages?', in *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited (500-1800)*, edited by Stefan Hanß and Juliane Schiel (Zurich: Cronos Verlag, 2014), 246.

⁵⁵⁷ Serjeant, 'Material for a History of Islamic Textiles', 15, 84.

⁵⁵⁸ Youval Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, translated by Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 66, 67, & 74.

⁵⁵⁹ Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, 21.

properly global context: luxury products, with high social (and monetary) value, appear more distinctly in the source material. However, these forest goods travelled even further afield. For example, Baltic amber is recorded in Cairo in some significant quantity in the 11th century; in that distant city, it was highly prized for use in female jewellery.⁵⁶⁰ However, the distance travelled for these ornaments was exceeded in the export of northern furs. Al-Umari attested in the early 1300s that “the garments of linen which are brought from Alexandria, and the countries of the Rus’ are worn exclusively by those whom the Sultan [of Delhi] honours with them”.⁵⁶¹ However, this trade in Rus’ furs between Alexandria and India seems to have existed at least as early as 1097, the date of a lawsuit in Cairo between Lebdi, a merchant, and Yekuthiel, Trustee of the Merchants, who had assigned him to take and sell many goods on a journey from Fustat to India, including “a *Rusi futa* from Susa”. Though originally destined for towns near Mumbai, this item was instead sold in Dahlak, on the Red Sea coast, where textiles were selling particularly well, according to Lebdi. It fetched a price of 30 dinars.⁵⁶²

There has been some debate as to what the Arabic phrase “*Rusi futa*” specifically refers to. Some sources have simply referred to it as ‘Russian linen’; this seems clearly incorrect, since the text gives its provenance as Susa, a town in modern Libya.⁵⁶³ Moreover, the notion that linen, a relatively commonplace good, would be exported from the steppe all the way to India seems exceptionally unlikely, especially (as noted by Shepard) given the fact “that flax [the basis of linen] was then the principal commodity in Egypt’s own economy”.⁵⁶⁴ The *futa*’s price indicates that it is a luxury good, as the only textiles recorded in the Geniza as fetching a higher price were those which had been

⁵⁶⁰ David Jacoby, ‘Constantinople as Commercial Transit Center’, 196.

⁵⁶¹ Serjeant, ‘Material for a History of Islamic Textiles’, 14, 101-2

⁵⁶² S. D. Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza (“India Book”)* (Boston MA: Brill, 2008), 168-72, 178-9.

⁵⁶³ Serjeant, ‘Material for a History of Islamic Textiles’ 14, 101-2; S. D. Goitein, ‘From the Mediterranean to India: Documents of the Trade to India, South Arabia and East Africa from the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries’, *Speculum* 29 (1954), 192.

⁵⁶⁴ Jonathan Shepard, ‘North-South, not just East-West: An understated nexus of Byzantium before and during the crusading era’, in *Crusading and Trading between West and East: Studies in honour of David Jacoby*, ed. Sophia Menache, Benjamin Z. Kedar, and Michel Balard (London: Routledge, 2019), 268.

embroidered or studded with jewels.⁵⁶⁵ The luxury element, designated by the *rusi* prefix, was almost certainly a fur lining, or similar.⁵⁶⁶ Such furs would surely have got to Susa via the Dnieper route, given the improbability of a Volga route for this item; such a route would have run from the Steppes, down through the Caspian Sea to Baghdad, then to a Mediterranean Port, from where it would have travelled a considerable distance to Susa before doubling back on itself to reach Egypt, and finally Dahlak – a very convoluted route. Given that the *Hudud al-Alam* recorded trade connections between (Libyan) Tripoli and Byzantium, it seems probable that nearby Susa also had some trade connections with Constantinople.⁵⁶⁷ We can thus trace Lebdi's *Rusi* futa along an approximate route, which began in the Steppes, then travelled down through the Black Sea to Constantinople and then (through any number of routes) across to Susa, before heading to Egypt and then Dahlak – a far less circuitous route. It can be shortened even further if the *Rusi* element was added to the futa in Egypt; however, whether the resulting garment could still be referred to as 'from Susa' after this, is less clear.

A more common route for Rus' furs was to travel from Constantinople directly to Alexandria. Trade routes between the two cities are well-attested, with the Byzantines buying spices and expensive textiles, and selling (among other things) cheese, herbs, and occasionally grain; a Greek-speaking market is attested in nearby Cairo as early as the 10th century.⁵⁶⁸ Thus the inclusion of a stop at Susa seems likely to be a 'statistical artefact', arising from the source material. This is likely because Geniza merchants, like those involved in the above-mentioned lawsuit, did not trade with Constantinople directly; in the surviving sources it is never once mentioned as a trade destination.⁵⁶⁹ Whilst they traded across the southern Mediterranean – Spain, Sicily, the Middle East and northern Africa – the Byzantine Empire was "not part of the trading world of the Geniza merchants".⁵⁷⁰ Crete and Chios

⁵⁶⁵ Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 178-9.

⁵⁶⁶ This is Goitein's interpretation. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 179.

⁵⁶⁷ *Hudud al-Alam*, 153.

⁵⁶⁸ Jacoby, 'Byzantine Trade with Egypt', 45-6.

⁵⁶⁹ Jessica L. Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean: The Geniza merchants and their business world* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 107 & 301-2.

⁵⁷⁰ Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean*, 26.

were perhaps the exceptions to this rule, but this is based on circumstantial evidence.⁵⁷¹ It is thus perfectly possible (indeed, highly probable) that Rus' furs more normally travelled directly from Constantinople to Alexandria. However, since the Geniza merchants did not travel this route, our surviving source material does not reflect this fact. In any event, this mercantile connection between the Rus' and Egypt was not only one way. Some gilded and enamelled glass vessels, as well as pottery, found in Novogrudok appears to be Egyptian in origin, and such a find is not unique in Rus' territory. In addition, another letter from the Geniza, written in the name of the "community of Kiev" regarding a debt, indicates that the possibility of transferring funds from Egypt to Rus' lands was not unreasonable.⁵⁷²

Rus' merchants, having reached Constantinople and sold their furs, slaves, amber and other goods, would have stocked up on local Byzantine products for their return journey. According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, these consisted of gold, wine and various fruits.⁵⁷³ Indeed, Franklin and Shepard noted that those Rus' merchants who specialised in importing wine from Crimean markets became so numerous that they gained their own unique identification: *Zalozniki*.⁵⁷⁴ By archaeological identification of amphora shards, we can identify the range of Rus' imports of Byzantine wine. Chersonite amphora (identified stylistically) can be found not only in Kiev, but throughout northern Russia, even in the (then) obscure hamlet of Moscow, as well as Beloozero (modern Belozersk, c.300 miles north of Moscow), suggesting a wide market for Byzantine wines. Whilst most of the wine amphora found in Rus' territory are Chersonite in origin, some 12th-century amphora found in Rus'

⁵⁷¹ Jacoby, 'Byzantine Trade with Egypt', 45; Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders of the Middle Ages*, 62ff. This particular list of goods includes "10 manns of Dodder of Thyme from Crete", although whether this was bought by the merchants from the island itself, or from a middleman outside of Byzantine territory, is unknown. Jacoby notes in Geniza documents the presence of mastic from Chios in Egypt around 1050, but again, there is no evidence to suggest that Geniza merchants had connections directly with Chios to purchase it.

⁵⁷² Shepard, 'North-South, not just East-West', 268.

⁵⁷³ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 82-3.

⁵⁷⁴ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 325.

territory suggest an Aegean origin, indicating that a variety of Byzantine wines were imported.⁵⁷⁵ The Rus' also imported (post-conversion) various religious artefacts, both those for public use in churches, and icons for more personal use.⁵⁷⁶ One charming if exceptional example is the Dagmar Cross, a golden piece of religious jewellery, likely intended for a bishop, found buried with Queen Dagmar (d. 1212) in Ringsted, Denmark. The figures depicted include Jesus, the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist, and the more Byzantine-focused figures of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great. It appears to have been made in Constantinople in the 11th century.⁵⁷⁷ Another unique item was an enamel binding for a gospel lectionary, commissioned in Constantinople by a certain Naslav, who claimed that "God only knows the price of this book".⁵⁷⁸ In addition, the Rus' were known to import iconographers to produce their art within the Rus' realm. One band of these artists arrived in Kiev in the 1080s, according to the *Paterik*; the narrative suggests that this was not an unusual event, save the fact that the iconographers and mosaicists turned out to have been hired by saintly ghosts.⁵⁷⁹ Two of the most miraculous icons of twelfth-century Kiev were imported from Byzantium: the Pirogoshcha *Theotokos*, and the Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir.⁵⁸⁰ Intriguingly, this religious-trinket trade apparently went both ways - a surviving article of Kiev-Byzantine religious trade is a Kievan-style reliquary cross, found in an excavated house in Cherson.⁵⁸¹

However, the most exciting Byzantine good, from a Rus' perspective, was surely silk. Byzantine textiles have been known to be exported through the Euxine region since the 10th century, when Ibn Rustah records that "the Magyars... make piratical raids on the Slavs and follow the coast [of the Black Sea]

⁵⁷⁵ Thomas S. Noonan and Roman K. Kovalev, 'Prayer, Illumination, and Good Times: The Export of Byzantine Wine and Oil to the North of Russia in pre-Mongol Times', in *The Expansion of Orthodox Europe: Byzantium, the Balkans and Russia*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (London: Routledge, 2016), 163-7.

⁵⁷⁶ Golden, 'Aspects of the Nomadic Factor in the Economic Development of the Kievan Rus', 71; Shepard, 'The Russian Steppe Frontier and the Black Sea zone', 227-8.

⁵⁷⁷ Piltz, 'Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia', in *Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia*, ed. Elisabeth Piltz (Jonsred: Paul Anstroms Forlag, 1998), 30.

⁵⁷⁸ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 315-6.

⁵⁷⁹ Noonan, 'Rus', Pechenegs, and Polovtsy', 312. *Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, 11.

⁵⁸⁰ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 316.

⁵⁸¹ Rabinowitz, Sedikova and Henneberg, 'Daily Life in a Provincial Late Byzantine City', 444.

with their captives to a port in Byzantine territory named Karkh [Kerch]. When the Magyars bring their prisoners to Karkh, the Greeks go there to trade. The Magyars sell their slaves and buy Byzantine brocade, woollen rugs, and other products of the Byzantine Empire.”⁵⁸² The Rus’ however, were able to take over this trade at the source, in Constantinople, where they were excellently positioned for trading silk; the Rus-Byzantine treaties of the 10th century had granted them the right to take home from the city five times as much silk as any other merchant.⁵⁸³ As a result, trade connections between Kiev and Constantinople could prove very lucrative. Much as with religious paraphernalia, this trade did not stop at Kiev. Some of this silk went even further afield, to Scandinavia or even Britain. The Shrine of St. Knud, in Odense, Denmark, has a silk textile with a Constantinopolitan eagle motif, which must have been put in the grave before the death of Knud’s widow in 1115.⁵⁸⁴ Silk in Edward the Confessor’s tomb (d.1066) was “probably Byzantine”; even if it had not been manufactured in a Constantinopolitan workshop, it certainly was traded via Constantinople. Silk uncovered from prosperous trading towns in the Danelaw, dating from the late 10th century, was again, according to Shepard, almost certainly Byzantine.⁵⁸⁵ This is corroborated by the fact that it was coloured with the red Kermes dye, made of crushed insects which only live on the Kermes Oak tree, which is found in the Mediterranean and especially on the Adriatic coastline; this therefore favours a Byzantine or Mediterranean source (as opposed to a central Asian source, which would have come via the Volga Route, and thus without crossing the Black Sea). Similar silks have been found in sites on the Irish Sea, although the origins of those silks are less sure than their English counterparts.⁵⁸⁶ A further piece of evidence cited for the export of Byzantine silk is the above-mentioned seal of Kosmas, found in Sigtuna

⁵⁸² Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 122-3.

⁵⁸³ Jacoby notes that the presence of Byzantine silk in Egypt in Genizah documents could indicate, however, that the restrictions on the export of Silk from Constantinople may not have been in force beyond the 10th century. *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 74-5; Marianne Vedeler, *Silk for the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015), 104’ Jacoby, ‘Byzantine Trade with Egypt’, 46.

⁵⁸⁴ Piltz, ‘Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia’, 30.

⁵⁸⁵ Jonathan Shepard, ‘From the Bosphorus to the British Isles: The Way from the Greeks to the Varangians’, in *Древнейшие Государства Восточной Европы, 2009 Год: Мрансконтинентальные и локальные пути как социокультурный феномен*, edited by T. N. Jaxon (Moscow: Indrik Press, 2010), 24 & 35.

⁵⁸⁶ Vedeler, *Silk for the Vikings*, 99.

in Sweden. The seal holds an image of John the Baptist and the phrase “Lord, preserve your servant Kosmas”. Similar phrases date the seal to the broad period 800-1100; a seal with a very similar image of John the Baptist has been reliably dated to 1042. Piltz argues that this seal would likely have been attached to documents permitting the export of Constantinopolitan silk, which would certainly have come via the Black Sea.⁵⁸⁷ However, it is not entirely clear that this is true. Edberg notes that the seal was found near fragments of amphorae, rather than any evidence of silk. Moreover, seals allowing the export of silk usually had an image of the reigning emperor, rather than a saint. Edberg thus believes the seal is more likely associated with priests than with silk export.⁵⁸⁸ Without further corroborating evidence, it is difficult to say one way or the other. Fortunately, evidence of Constantinopolitan-Viking silk trade does not depend upon the interpretation of this one seal.

Sold Down the River? The ‘Decline’ of the Dnieper Route

Having now examined both the reach and the content of the Dnieper route, we can turn to the much-debated topic of the durability of this Kiev-Constantinople connection, and its alleged decline, which deserves much closer analysis than it has been given to date. Whilst the connections between the Rus’ and the Byzantine Empire are made much of during the 9th and 10th centuries, with the fabulous tales of ships cruising over land, and sails of silk, the extent of Rus’-Byzantine connection after the turn of the millennium is less well-established.⁵⁸⁹ This has allowed the proliferation of a largely baseless historiographical argument of decline in Rus’-Byzantine trade, which is not supported by the evidence.

It has been commonly asserted (for example, by Vasiliev and Piltz) that the expansion of nomadic tribes across the western portion of the Pontic-Caspian steppe rendered trade between Kiev and Constantinople too hazardous, ‘blockading’ the trade route. As a result, Rus’-Byzantine trade had

⁵⁸⁷ Piltz ‘Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia’, 30.

⁵⁸⁸ Rune Edberg, ‘Vem Var Kosmas? Två bysantinska sigill från Sigtunas vikingatida hamn’ [‘Who was Kosmas? Two Byzantine seals from Sigtuna’s Viking harbour’], in *Vikingars guld ur Mälarens Djup: tio artiklar med anledning av en utställning*, edited by Sten Tesch and Rune Edberg (Sigtuna: Sigtuna Museer, 1999), 24.

⁵⁸⁹ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 64-5.

ceased by the 12th century.⁵⁹⁰ This argument is based on two questionable premises: firstly, that the arrival of the Qipjaqs fundamentally changed the geopolitics of the Black Sea Steppe-frontier, and secondly, that the Qipjaq-Rus' relationship was one of antagonism only.

The arrival of the Qipjaqs in the 10th-11th centuries was not a great change for the steppe-frontier. In the long term, the Qipjaqs were 'just another' nomadic group migrating westward from central Asia; in this respect, there was little unique about them. The Qipjaq expansion, it is argued, changed the political situation as their zone of control expanded across the north of the Black Sea, beyond the Dnieper, and thus severed Rus' connection with that sea. The Rus' were not able to counter the Qipjaq interposals. They had only rarely and briefly held complete territorial control from Kiev to the Euxine. Vladimir's control of Byzantine Cherson in 988/9 lasted only until the ceasing of hostilities with the Empire.⁵⁹¹ More enduring was the principedom of Tmutorokan (an alternative name for Matracha, one of the towns in chapter one); this principedom, however, was ruled with Byzantine consent, and moreover was deemed distant enough from the control of the princes of Kiev that exiled pretenders fled there to avoid capture.⁵⁹² Meanwhile, 'Cumania', the land of the Qipjaq-Cuman confederation, is identified in contemporary sources as stretching as far as the Danube river; thus even though nomadic borders shift, and our source material is usually vague, we can assume that the Dnieper river was well under their control.⁵⁹³ However, the Pechenegs had dwelt in this very same swathe of land, and had used it just as commonly to depredate the Dnieper trade route.⁵⁹⁴ Certainly, in *De Administrando*,

⁵⁹⁰ Vasiliev 'Economic Relations between Byzantium and Old Russia', 320 & 326; Piltz, 'Varangian Companies for Long Distance Trade', 103.

⁵⁹¹ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 116; Franklin Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 162. There is an interesting theory that Vladimir was in fact *restoring* the city of Cherson to Byzantine hands, for which see A. Poppe, 'The Political Background to the Baptism of the Rus': Byzantine-Russian relations between 986-989', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976), 195-244; for the counterargument, see D. Obolensky, 'Cherson and the Conversion of the Rus': an anti-revisionist view', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 13 (1989), 244-56. Whilst an interesting debate, it is not pertinent to the argument of this chapter.

⁵⁹² *The Chronicle of Novgorod*, 6; J. Shepard, 'Closer encounters with the Byzantine World', 31 & 40; Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 260.

⁵⁹³ István Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars: Oriental military in the pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185-1365* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32.

⁵⁹⁴ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 60-63.

Constantine Porphyrogenetos records that “the Russians cannot come to this imperial city of the Romans, either for war or for trade, unless they are at peace with the Pechenegs.”⁵⁹⁵ Thus although the Qipjaqs interposed themselves between the Rus’ and the Black Sea, there is no evidence that their occupation of the territory and relationship with their neighbours was any more disruptive than that of the Pechenegs. The names on the map may have changed, but the practicality of trade was still the same.

Secondly, the notion that the Qipjaq-Rus’ relationship was solely one of conflict is a severe oversimplification. Certainly there was conflict. Nomadic incursions into Rus’ territory were common; however, the Rus’ were far from simple defenceless victims of the horse-borne raiders. Vladimir Monomach, after initial defeats, had great success against the Qipjaqs, driving them to the Caucasus in 1118. This was possibly done in concert with Davit IV the Restorer of Georgia.⁵⁹⁶ In addition, treating the Qipjaqs as a single entity with united ambitions is misleading. Neither the Rus’ nor the Qipjaqs were monolithic. Some Qipjaqs worked with the Rus’. Two sons of Vladimir Monomach were married to Qipjaq brides.⁵⁹⁷ Some Qipjaqs entered Rus’ service in the group known as the ‘Black Caps’, even adopting the Christianity of their new lords. Still others retained their independence from the Rus’ but still interfered in their politics. Between 1128 and 1161, Franklin and Shepard count no fewer than 15 different interventions by Qipjaqs in favour of the descendants of their one-time ally, Oleg Sviatoslavich, a cousin of Vladimir Monomach. Indeed, the 1169 sack of Kiev by an assortment of Rus’ princes is notable because of the *lack* of Qipjaq allies.⁵⁹⁸ In addition, there were also more peaceful examples of co-operation. One Qipjaq khan, having died, was buried in a coffin with four Rus’ locks. Whilst much of the other booty with which he travelled to the afterlife could have been looted – a silk kaftan with golden plaques, a cap with silver edging, an assortment of brocade, bronze censers,

⁵⁹⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 50-51.

⁵⁹⁶ Maximilian C. G. Lau, ‘Multilateral Co-Operation in the Black Sea in the Late Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries’, 32.

⁵⁹⁷ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 326-8.

⁵⁹⁸ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 337-8; Noonan, ‘Rus’, Pechenegs and Polovtsy’, 302.

grivnas, and, of course, a copious amount of gold – the possibility of stealing four coffin-locks seems so extraordinary that surely they were the result of either commission or trade; in either case, it would be indicative of peaceful commercial interactions with the Rus'.⁵⁹⁹ It is because of such finds that Noonan states that economic interaction and co-operation was “an integral part of the overall relationship” between the Qipjaqs and the Rus'.⁶⁰⁰ Thus, although there was conflict between the Rus' and the Qipjaq tribes, there was also co-operation and assistance. Theft and trade, war and alliance, existed in flux with each other.

Clearly, relations between the Rus' and the Qipjaq nomads were much more complicated than the simple 'blockade' argument would have us believe. It is true that, on occasion, the Qipjaqs attacked the Rus' merchants; in response, the Rus' princes would sometimes provide military guards. A particularly drastic period came in the 1160s, when the sources record that the Rus' could not trade southwards because the Qipjaqs “are taking away from us the Greek Route, the Salt Route [to Sea of Azov], and the Route of the Vines [to Crimea]”.⁶⁰¹ However, records of these events exist precisely because they were unusual, rather than the normal state of affairs. Trade along the Dnieper proceeding normally was hardly worth recording.⁶⁰² The Qipjaqs did not 'by default' obstruct the trade routes with the Black Sea; rather, on the rare occasions when the nomads did hinder the passage of trade, it was both a novelty, and a cause for serious concern among the Rus' nobles. Thus we can see that Franklin and Shepard are right in their firm dismissal: “If alternative [trade] routes... had come more into play, it was not because the [Qipjaqs] had made Kiev inaccessible – they had not.”⁶⁰³ If there truly was a decline in Dnieper trade traffic, then evidence for that decline must be sought elsewhere. The mere presence of Qipjaqs along the Dnieper route is insufficient.

⁵⁹⁹ Noonan, 'Rus', Pechenegs and Polovtsy', 319.

⁶⁰⁰ Noonan, 'Rus', Pechenegs and Polovtsy', 326.

⁶⁰¹ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 325; *Полное собрание русских летописей* ['Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles'], Vol 2 (St. Petersburg: Typography of M. A. Aleksandrov, 1908), col. 538.

⁶⁰² Noonan, 'Rus, Pechenegs, and Polovtsy', 324.

⁶⁰³ Franklin and Shepard, *Emergence of the Rus*, 338.

Indications for the endurance of the Dnieper route, however, can be easily found; literary evidence clearly shows a continuance of Rus'-Byzantine trade during the 11th and 12th centuries. In Russian chronicles, we have explicit references to merchants plying the route in both the 1080s and the 1160s; in the 1160s they are still referred to as *Grechniki* ('Greek-route traders'), which implies that the trade is still regular.⁶⁰⁴ Abbot Daniel, a Russian pilgrim from Chernigov, made the journey to Jerusalem via Constantinople in 1106-7; his account of his travel begins only at Constantinople, which could be an indication that the first leg (i.e. the Dnieper route) was familiar enough that it had little of interest for his readers.⁶⁰⁵ In 1136, the tax-charter for the Bishopric of Smolensk still insists that the Dnieper route is the most profitable Rus' trade route.⁶⁰⁶ Russian merchants are mentioned in Constantinople in the late 1160s by Benjamin of Tudela, and there was a Russian quarter in Constantinople as late as 1200, according to another Russian pilgrim.⁶⁰⁷ The latest evidence of Russian merchants in Constantinople comes from a letter of Michael Choniates, when he requests from the Nicean Emperor Theodore Laskaris a white rabbit fur, 'such as the Russians bring down to the megalopolis'.⁶⁰⁸ All this literary evidence suggests that the Dnieper route was in use between Kiev and Constantinople more-or-less continuously at least up to the 13th century.

Numismatically, evidence regarding the continuance of the Dnieper route is more difficult to interpret. Analyses of coin finds by Piltz, Noonan and Kusserow, both at the very end of the Dnieper route in

⁶⁰⁴ Noonan, 'Rus, Pechenegs, and Polovtsy', 324.

⁶⁰⁵ C. W. Wilson, ed, *The Pilgrimage of the Russian Abbot Daniel in the Holy Land, 1106-7 AD* (London: Palestine Pilgrims Text Society, 1895).

⁶⁰⁶ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 335.

⁶⁰⁷ Benjamin of Tudela, *The Itinerary*, 20; Antony of Novgorod, 'Description des lieux-saints de Constantinople', in *Itinéraires Russes en Orient*, translated by B. de Khitrowo (Geneva: Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1889), 105; Choniates, *Historia*, 332; Harry Magoulias, trans, *O City of Byzantium: The Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 183; *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 74; Shepard, 'Constantinople: Gateway to the North', 253.

It is not entirely clear that Antony's reference is to specifically a *merchant's* quarter, rather than just a quarter, as he is unspecific. The location of this quarter was far from St. Mamas, their residence in the 10th-century treaties; instead, it was near the Church of Forty Martyrs, which is "in the heart of the city", according to Choniates. This location was once a home for the praetorian guard, so perhaps Antony is referring to a Varangian guard office.

⁶⁰⁸ Michael Choniates, *Epistulae*, 286. The greek is "ὁποῖους ἡ Ῥωσία κατάγει εἰς τὴν μεγαλόπολιν".

Scandinavia, and in Kievan territory proper, reveal patterns which have been used to suggest a decline in Byzantine trade with Rus' at some stage in the 12th century. However, whether the data can be reliably used to support such an argument is not so obvious.

Byzantine coins rarely reached Sweden before the mid-tenth century; however, after this date, the number of coins found rises dramatically. There are 15 coins for the years 829-945, but 410 coins for 950-1000.⁶⁰⁹ The eleventh century also finds coins in the Baltic area. These are most concentrated on the heavily-mercantilised island of Gotland, which has 205 coins belonging to Basil II (976-1025), and a further 112 belonging to the reign of Constantine IX (1042-55); however, coins belonging to these emperors can also be found in Poland (18), Estonia (165), mainland Sweden (35), Denmark (12), Finland (14) and even Belarus (only 3).⁶¹⁰ Notably, in all cases, there are fewer coins belonging to Constantine IX than Basil II, but these still represent an increase on previous emperors of the 10th century (we should also note that Basil II ruled nearly four times as long as Constantine IX).⁶¹¹ The latest Byzantine coin found in Sweden belongs to Emperor Nikephoros III (1078-81); the latest hoard containing a Byzantine coin is dated to around 1120/21.⁶¹² Numismatic evidence for Kievan territory tells a similar story. Noonan's analysis of Byzantine coin circulation in the Kievan Rus' dates the latest hoard to contain a Byzantine coin c.1130, around the same time as the last Swedish hoard; however, the latest minted coin belonged to the reign of John II Komnenos (1118-1143), which is considerably later than that of Sweden.⁶¹³ Interestingly, Byzantine coins apparently tended to gravitate toward Novgorod rather than Kiev.⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁹ Vedeler, *Silk for the Vikings*, 66.

⁶¹⁰ M. Kusserow, 'Mer än bara mynt: En nätverksanalys av bysantinska silvermynt från 900- och 1000-tal'. ['More than just coins: A network analysis of Byzantine silver coins from the 10th and 11th centuries'], (Master's Thesis, Uppsala University, 2019), 31 and 32 (Tables 7 and 8).

⁶¹¹ Kusserow, 'Mer än bara mynt', 22 (Table 1).

⁶¹² Brita Malmer, 'Some observations on the Importation of Byzantine Coins to Scandinavia in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries and the Scandinavian Response', *Russian History* 28 (2001), 295.

⁶¹³ Thomas S. Noonan, 'The Circulation of Byzantine Coins in Kievan Rus'', *Byzantine Studies/Études Byzantines* 7.2 (1980), 168.

⁶¹⁴ Noonan, 'The Circulation of Byzantine Coins', 156-7.

However, Noonan's work in particular indicates some severe problems with using this numismatic data as a measure for trade.⁶¹⁵ Despite the abundant written and archaeological evidence for long-standing (and profitable) Rus'-Byzantine trade, there is almost no coinage in Kievan lands. To put some numbers to it: there are approximately 17,000 Islamic dirhams alone found in hoards in the areas around Kiev. In the same region, there are not even 200 Byzantine coins of any kind.⁶¹⁶ Even in hoards of mixed coin origin, Byzantine coins make up less than half of one percent of coins in the medieval Kievan realm.⁶¹⁷ This is drastically fewer coins than we might expect.

Shepard attempts to explain this absence by suggesting that the Rus' predilection for silver coins would have led to them preferring non-Byzantine coins (and thus presumably exchanging their coins when they had the opportunity).⁶¹⁸ This does not seem convincing, not least because the majority of surviving Byzantine coins from circulation hoards *are* silver miliaresia – 91%.⁶¹⁹ Thus, given the high preponderance of silver coins involved in Rus' interactions with the Byzantine monetary system, there would be no reason for the Rus' to prefer Islamic or Latin coins over Byzantine ones. In addition, runestones set up by Viking merchant-adventurers commonly describe trade with Greece using the phrase "exchanging for gold".⁶²⁰ Use of such a phrase would certainly be less likely if the primary aim of Rus' trade was exchange for silver; an equally poetic phrase recognising the greater value of silver could be used instead, but it never is.

⁶¹⁵ A further complication in Noonan's studies are his distinction (in different articles) between hoard-finds, and individual finds. In particular, his analysis in 'The Circulation of Byzantine Coins in Kievan Rus'' removes all finds where Byzantine coins were found without any other coins. This, combined with a lack of precise data for many hoards (not due to any fault on Noonan's part), causes difficulties in making independent assessments of the numismatic data, due to the probability both of missing data and of 'double-entries'. The absence of a complete raw data set is frustrating.

⁶¹⁶ Noonan, 'Monetary History of Kiev', 396.

⁶¹⁷ Noonan, 'The Circulation of Byzantine Coins', 148.

⁶¹⁸ Shepard, 'Constantinople: Gateway to the North', 246.

⁶¹⁹ Noonan, 'Circulation of Byzantine Coins', 150. Curiously, in Kiev itself (rather than the region), bronze/copper coins are most common (70% of Byzantine coins), and even gold coins are more common than silver. Again, the lack of raw data frustrates more accurate analysis. Noonan, 'Monetary History of Kiev', 397.

⁶²⁰ Piltz, 'Varangian Companies for Long Distance Trade', 86-8.

An alternative possibility is that there are *no* missing silver coins. The balance of trade between the Rus' and Byzantium was not made up by Byzantine silver, but by commodities, primarily silk. Noonan posits this possibility also, noting the number of Byzantine imports found at Rus' sites.⁶²¹ There is also literary evidence in support of such a postulation. According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, the treaty of 945 has the interesting provision that "if any slave runs away from the Russes in [Byzantine] territory... and is not found... they [the Russes] shall receive from us their due, two pieces of silk per slave".⁶²² The fact that this provision is made in silk, rather than in coinage, or left generic, is notable. It is also notable that the price of the slave is not deemed variable here, as it is later, when ransoming slaves of Rus' or Byzantine nationality, or as when considering the case of theft.⁶²³ This trade-balance proposal becomes more reasonable when we bear in mind the amount of silk Rus' are allowed to take home – 50 bezants' worth, five times as much as any other merchant.⁶²⁴ In addition, we must note that some Rus' apparently came to Constantinople without merchandise.⁶²⁵ Either they are not merchants, which seems unlikely, or they are there only to purchase, not to sell, which would suggest significant additional Rus' imports.

There are problems with this thesis. On the one hand, it assumes a near-insatiable appetite for silk from Rus' merchants (not to mention near-unlimited supply in Constantinople), even if we assume that the vast majority is being resold by the Rus' to Varangians further north. Trying to diversify the array of Rus' imports does not solve this problem, due to the advance of Kievan crafting abilities during the 12th century. The Rus' developed their own industries in glass-making and pottery; their jewellers made a range of goods in amber, bronze, silver and gold, and gained knowledge of niello, enamel inlay, and filigree techniques. Rus' iconography also developed during this period.⁶²⁶ The advance of these

⁶²¹ Noonan, 'Monetary History of Kiev', 398-9.

⁶²² *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 75. Judging by other clauses in the treaty, the rough exchange rate was 5 bezants per "piece" of silk.

⁶²³ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 75.

⁶²⁴ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 75; Vedeler, *Silk for the Vikings*, 104.

⁶²⁵ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 75.

⁶²⁶ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 280-1 & 316.

techniques would reduce the number of these goods that the Rus' would import from Constantinople, altering the balance of trade. Thus, such a hypothesis would cause us to expect more Byzantine coins towards the end of the 12th century, rather than fewer (as there are).

Piltz offers an third, more convincing suggestion, that Byzantine coins were melted down and re-used for their material, rather than monetary, value.⁶²⁷ Certainly, Byzantine coins were sometimes used as necklaces and jewellery, rather than as financial tools.⁶²⁸ Four of Noonan's 33 analysed circulation-hoards had the coins preserved in some sort of necklace or piece of jewellery.⁶²⁹ Ibn Fadlan noted that the Rus' converted their monetary wealth into necklaces, presumably often by melting it down.⁶³⁰ In addition, the 12th century saw the increased use of ingots as currency in the Kievan realm.⁶³¹ The Kievan Rus' had no source of silver of their own; thus all these ingots must have been made by the melting and re-casting of imported silver coins.⁶³² Kievan ingots had a distinct hexagonal cast; thus we can link ingots found outside Kiev, but possessing this shape, with the Rus'. Calculated by weight, the silver in these ingots are equal to approximately 115,000 dirhams or deniers. Based on the number of ingots, and the fact that there was no silver source in the Kievan realm, Noonan calculates that the 150 years before Mongol arrival saw up to 6 times more silver imported into Kiev than during the two centuries of trade with the Arab world via the Volga route; or 3 times more silver than imported from Europe – a "truly massive" amount.⁶³³ The origin of the silver for these ingots is unknown. Noonan suggests European deniers are the most likely, as they are "more recent imports than dirhams, and there were far more of them than miliaresia".⁶³⁴ Alternatively the reverse argument seems more

⁶²⁷ Piltz, 'Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia', 29.

⁶²⁸ Malmer, 'Importation of Byzantine Coins to Scandinavia', 296. A more famous example, though from outside our period, is the Wilton Cross, an Anglo-Saxon pendant containing a 7th-Century Byzantine *Solidus*, stored at the British Museum (museum number 1859,0512.1), visible here: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1859-0512-1.

⁶²⁹ Noonan, 'Circulation of Byzantine Coins', 178-80.

⁶³⁰ Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*, 86.

⁶³¹ Noonan, 'Monetary History of Kiev', 406.

⁶³² Noonan, 'Monetary History of Kiev', 384-5.

⁶³³ Noonan, 'Monetary History of Kiev', 384-5 & 406.

⁶³⁴ Noonan, 'Monetary history of Kiev', 400.

convincing; the absence of Byzantine miliaria is surely *more* suggestive of their regularly being melted down to cast ingots.

None of these explanations is entirely satisfactory. As it is, we have significant problems with the use of numismatic data to assess Rus'-Byzantine trade. Either our data is drastically incomplete, due to the sheer number of missing coins, which would render any anomalous results far more influential than they should be; or our written sources have grossly exaggerated the importance of the Dnieper route, in which case we are building on very uncertain foundations, and it is therefore difficult to use numismatic analysis on that basis either.

A more creative approach to analysis of the decline of the Dnieper route would be to investigate the relative fortunes of Cherson and Sudaq, the two primary Crimean cities. Cherson, situated on the western coast of the Crimean peninsula, is much closer to the Dnieper river mouth, and a little closer to Constantinople, than is Sudaq. Cherson, therefore was naturally the major city for merchants travelling the Kiev-Constantinople route via the Dnieper. However, if this Dnieper route were to decline, then Sudaq, situated at the 'apex' of Crimea, could provide closer connections to Trebizond, the Sea of Azov, and much of Anatolia. Thus, as the prominence of the Dnieper route declined, and Dnieper traders took up a less significant proportion of Euxine trade, the role of Cherson as a trading depot would become less important, and merchants would be more likely instead to travel to Sudaq; on the other hand, should Cherson remain prominent, it would be indicative of the continued significance of the Dnieper trade route.

We can demonstrate the comparative unimportance of Sudaq at the start of our period by noting that it is not mentioned in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* (which concludes its account in 1117), despite the possibility of the town being a destination for Rus' merchants. Nor does Sudaq appear in *De Administrando Imperio*, at least by name, although it could have been obliquely referred to when

Porphyrogenetos mentions “the cities of the regions”.⁶³⁵ However, certainly it was not considered important enough to bring direct attention to, especially compared with Cherson, which has its whole history discussed, and relevant political and economic strategies and nuances elaborated upon.

However, during the 13th century, Sudaq had become far the more prominent of the two cities. The Genoese would build a fortress there, and it would also attract the interest of other, more local powers: Sudaq was attacked both by the Sultanate of Rum (in 1222) and the Golden Horde (1223).⁶³⁶ Importantly, we have evidence of a distinct shift in trade patterns. Anna Komnene recorded that during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos, “the Qipjaqs come regularly to Cherson to trade and acquire the goods which they needed.”⁶³⁷ However, by 1220-21, Ibn al-Athir described how the Qipjaqs instead “came to the town of Sudaq, which is the Qipjaq’s city from which they trade. It is on the Black Sea and ships come there, bearing textiles.”⁶³⁸ This suggests that, at least for the Qipjaqs, the markets of Sudaq had become more practical from a commercial point of view, indicating a larger market there. Of course, trading in Sudaq and trading in Cherson are not mutually exclusive; however, Al-Athir’s phrasing suggests that Sudaq is certainly the more common market for Qipjaq goods.

A potentially illuminating incident regarding the relative commercial fortunes of Cherson and Sudaq is recorded in the hagiography of St. Eugenios of Trebizond:

A ship with a cargo of levies collected in Cherson and the neighbouring region of Gothia, and with Alexios Paktiars, a fiscal officer, and certain officials of Cherson on board, was on its way here [to Trebizond] to deliver the annual revenues to the Emperor Gidos. In heavy sea it ran ashore at Sinope. The above said *Rais* [Governor

⁶³⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio* 182-4

⁶³⁶ Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol 3, 222-3; A. C. S. Peacock, ‘The Saljūq Campaign against the Crimea and the Expansionist Policy of the Early Reign of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn Kayqubād’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16.2 (2006), 134ff.

⁶³⁷ Komnene, *Alexiad*, ed. Beck, 285; Dawes, *The Alexiad*, 238.

⁶³⁸ Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol 3, 222-3.

of Sinope] seized and plundered the ship with her goods and all on board, including the crew... When the Trapezuntines heard this, the Emperor [of Trebizond] realised the calamity of the barbarians and the fact that the treaty with the Sultan had been violated... [*conflict ensues*] ...Finally the commanders exchanged Pakitares and the *sermion*, his ship, with its goods for captives only and returned home in joy with a great fortune. They also brought with them all the spoils that those people [the Sultanate of Rum] had taken in the district of Cherson.⁶³⁹

This incident took place in 1223. What is notable here is that the goods being brought from Cherson are not products of trade. These are levies, taxes, imposed by the Emperor of Trebizond on his overseas territories (*Perateia*). Nor are there merchants on board – all important people are officials. The complete absence of merchants from this episode is certainly not conclusive, but perhaps telling. Ibn al-Athir gives a different account of a shipwreck near Sinope. In 1223, following the Mongol rout of the Rus'-Qipjaq allied forces, the Rus' fled from Sudaq:⁶⁴⁰

Many of the leading Rus' merchants and wealthy men gathered together, loaded up what they held precious and set out to cross the sea to the lands of Islam in several ships. When they drew near the harbour they were making for, one of their ships foundered and sank, although those on board were saved. The custom in force was that every ship that foundered belonged to the sultan, who gained a great deal from that. The rest of the ships arrived safely and their passengers told of this circumstance.⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁹ Rosenqvist, *The Hagiographical Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond*, 310-3.

⁶⁴⁰ Sudaq is not explicitly specified; the region instead referred to as is "the land of the Qipjaqs"; however, this did not include Cherson, so the likely departure point was indeed Sudaq.

⁶⁴¹ Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol 3 223-4

It is the opinion of Peacock that these two accounts refer to the same incident, on the basis that they take place in the same year, and at the same location. This reasoning has the virtue of simplicity; however, it is not conclusive. Peacock himself notes that the dating (among other details) of the hagiographical account is suspect, so it may well be that it did not in fact take place in the same year as Al-Athir's account.⁶⁴² Furthermore, we should consider some important differences between Al-Athir and the Hagiography: there are ships, plural, coming from Sudaq, not a singular ship from Cherson; the travellers are Rus' refugee merchants, not Trapezuntine tax officials; they are fleeing the Mongols, not making an annual and customary journey; the ship's cargo is privately owned, not state revenues; and there is no resulting war, but rather the whole event is noted as peaceful.

These are many and significant conflicts between the two accounts. Ibn al-Athir's proximity to events and more realistic approach to historical events leads me to believe that his account is the most accurate; however, this does not mean that the hagiographical account is wrong. As it is, Peacock would have us believe that the start-point, destination, occupants, and motive of the Hagiographical voyage are all incorrectly recorded, but that the date *is* correct. At some point, one must wonder whether the resulting vessel is the Ship of Theseus, having sailed straight out of the famous philosophical puzzle. In an effort to reconcile the two accounts, Peacock essentially erases all details from one to avoid conflict with the other. If we insist the date is right, why must all other details be wrong? And if the date is wrong, then what is to stop two ships from sinking off the northern Anatolian coast in separate incidents? Indeed, Ibn al-Athir notes that "the custom in force was that every ship that foundered belonged to the Sultan"; this is indeed suggestive of multiple shipwrecks. In either event – one shipwreck or two – we are left with evidence of Sudaq's commercial supremacy over Cherson. Merchants came from Sudaq, not from Cherson; and if there were a ship from Cherson, it

⁶⁴² Peacock, 'The Saljūq Campaign against the Crimea', 147.

was carrying tax and tax officials, rather than traders. This incident – or these incidents – provide further evidence of Sudaq’s commercial rise.

By 1253, when William of Rubruck travelled to the region, the situation had clarified completely. He describes the Crimean towns thus:

We put into the territory of Gasaria or Cassaria, which is triangular in shape and has on its western side a city called Cherson, where Saint Clement was martyred, and as we were sailing past it we saw an island which is a temple said to have been built by angelic hands. In the middle on the south side – at the apex, as it were – lies a city called Soldaia [Sudaq], which looks across to Sinopolis [Sinope] and there land all the merchants who come from Turkia and wish to visit the northern regions, as also those who come across from the opposite direction, from Russia and the north and wish to cross over to Turkia.⁶⁴³

The difference in description between the two cities is substantial. Cherson is given antique religious importance, but “all” the commerce is going through Sudaq. The goods described there – “squirrel and miniver and other valuable furs... lengths of cotton, silk cloth and fragrant spices” – are indicative of trade from all portions of the Black Sea. In the above extract, the only merchants specified are Turkic or ‘northern’ in origin; however, Rubruck is accompanying “merchants from [Latin] Constantinople” to that city. Later on, he is recommended to take on his travels carts “which the Rus’ merchants use” (a decision he later regrets), implying that Rus’ merchants also frequent this city, and did so overland, not by sea.⁶⁴⁴ Moreover, the presence of silk seems likely to suggest trade links with Georgia or the Caucasus, as Constantinople was ruled by the Latin Empire at this time, and therefore

⁶⁴³ William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 64-5.

⁶⁴⁴ William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 66.

had lost much of its silk production. Thus, by 1253, Sudaq was clearly the predominant trading destination in the Crimea, and possibly the only one of any significance.

It may even have been the case even earlier: following his account of the Rus' refugees, Ibn al-Athir states that, upon the capture of Sudaq by the Mongols, "No sable, squirrel or beaver furs or other items exported from those lands were sent out".⁶⁴⁵ If this is true, this would mean that Sudaq was the only commercial port on the Crimea as early as 1223. Jacoby argues that the Venetian-Egyptian treaties of 1238-54, implying "a marked increase in the import of... furs to Egypt from the first half of the thirteenth century onwards", contradict this possibility; however, the capture of Sudaq and the resulting interruption of trade surely would not cause a 15-year cessation of trade, and the Mongols were not interested in preventing trade - quite the contrary.⁶⁴⁶ Jacoby's argument here leaves something to be desired; al-Athir's statement may yet be valid, and if literal, may imply Sudaq's mercantile dominance from 30 years earlier than is certain.

We can attempt to identify the 'tipping point' between the two cities. Vasiliev suggested that Sudaq overtook Cherson in the second half of the 12th century.⁶⁴⁷ There are two pieces of evidence which suggest this is indeed the case. Al-Idrisi's description of the Black Sea includes both Sudaq and Cherson as towns of note, although his detailed account mentions nearly 50 coastal towns around the Sea, some quite small, making it difficult to gauge the absolute or relative importance of their markets.⁶⁴⁸ More selective is the *Liber de existencia riveriarum*, of Italian origin, which Jacoby suggests can be dated to the period 1160-1200. Here, the author mentions only 10 Black Sea ports: Constantinople, Herakleia, Amastris, Trebizond, Matracha, Sudaq, Cherson, the Danube, Costanza, Varna, and

⁶⁴⁵ Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, 224.

⁶⁴⁶ *T&T*, vol 2, 339 & 487; Jacoby, 'Constantinople as a Commercial Transit Centre', 205.

⁶⁴⁷ Vasiliev. 'Economic Relations between Byzantium and Old Russia', 328.

⁶⁴⁸ Al-Idrisi, *Opus Geographicum*, 259-264. See also the 'accompanying' map, Al-Idrisi. *Charta Rogeriana – Weltkarte des Idrisi – vom Jahr 1154*, ed. Konrad Miller (Stuttgart: Konrad Miller, 1928).

Mesembria.⁶⁴⁹ These are all significant commercial harbours – indeed, a notable absence is Sinope. This suggests that, when this portolan was made, both Cherson and Sudaq remained important ports. Up until c.1200, therefore, we have evidence of both Cherson and Sudaq as destinations of significance for commerce. After this period, however, there is no mention of Cherson as a trading destination. It appeared to remain a notable town (see Rubruck, above), but is no longer mentioned for its economic potential. Indeed, as early as 1206, a contract worth 100 hyperpyra was concluded in Constantinople between Petrus de Ferragudo and Zacharias Stagnarius, where the Crimean destination was not Cherson but Sudaq.⁶⁵⁰ This suggests that Cherson ceased to be important during the early 13th century. This allows for the alluring conclusion that the 1204 sack of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade was the turning point in Cherson's fortunes. At a stroke, the Rus' merchants lost all their trading partners – and, more importantly, privileges – in Constantinople; meanwhile, the Venetians, a new, distinctly maritime merchant collective, had moved onto the scene, unchallenged by their rivals. In such a scenario, the Rus' merchant routes could not help but decline in prominence.

Dnieper Route: Conclusion

In sum, the Dnieper route was a flourishing and exciting trade network during our period. Its dealers trafficked a range of goods: forest goods such as honey and furs were shipped south by Rus' merchants, accompanied often by slaves; on the return journey these merchants took exciting luxuries back to Kiev – fruits, wines, and of course silks. Many of these commodities were resold by new traders, leaving the Black Sea and often the Mediterranean world altogether. Some of these were carried far past Kiev, reaching Scandinavia and even the British Isles, while others were destined for India. Furthermore, the Rus' do not appear to have been the only ones travelling this route; Chersonite

⁶⁴⁹ David Jacoby, 'An unpublished Medieval portolan of the Mediterranean in Minneapolis', in *Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in honour of John Pryor*, edited by Ruthy Gertwagen and Elizabeth Jeffreys (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 65 & 69.

⁶⁵⁰ Lillie, *Handel und Politik*, 136-7.

merchants appear to have also headed north, as far as Kiev, perhaps even further. In addition, in the key Euxine ports of Cherson and Sudaq, traders of further nationalities could be found, including Pechenegs, Qipjaqs, and Radhanite Jews, linking further economic spheres with the Dnieper traffickers.

Meanwhile, the evidence demonstrates clearly that the Kiev-Constantinople route, and its various tributaries and outgrowths which contributed to the Dnieper trading nexus, continued to be in use until the 13th century. Indications of decline are, in matter of fact, significantly limited. The written sources suggest that it continued to flourish at least up until the 1160s, possibly even beyond; any interruptions appear to be anomalous, rather than indicative of a steady decrease in trade. However, numismatic evidence is suggestive of an earlier decline. With the two data sets so drastically at odds, and the many complications regarding the accuracy and assessment of our numismatic data, it is hard to draw a fair verdict on the strength of Rus'-Byzantine trade during the 12th century. The endurance of Cherson as a trade destination up until the fall of Constantinople, however, is suggestive of a continued mercantile aspect to the Dnieper river. In any event, we can confidently say that if there was a decline in this trade, it was not due to the expansion of the Qipjaqs into the western portion of the steppe, despite historiographical allegations to the contrary; their relationship with the Rus', though complex, was not so fraught as to render unusable the long-established trade-routes southwards.

iii. Pontic Persistence: The Survival of Trapezuntine Commerce

We now turn our attention from the Dnieper route to the port of Trebizond, the third major Euxine trading port, besides Constantinople and Cherson. As noted above, other commentators have proposed that Trebizond suffered a sustained economic decline during this period, due to the redirection of the Silk Road; however, any such decline was minimal. Trebizond's financial diversity allowed it to endure such problems. Any decline which did occur, would have been due more to the temporary disturbances of the Seljuq arrival and wars.

Caravans of Chaldia: Trebizond's myriad trades

Trebizond, situated in the south-eastern corner of the Black Sea, held an economic prominence based on its two primary trading functions: it acted both as a border-outpost between Byzantium and the Muslim world, allowing for commercial exchange, and also as an outlet for trans-Eurasian trade on the Silk Road. Written evidence for the importance of Trebizond as a destination for merchants is readily available. Indeed, so important were such merchants to the city of Trebizond, that the *strategos* of the local theme of Chaldaia was given a notably smaller salary than most of his counterparts, as he would be able to double his salary through gains from the *Kommerkion* customs revenue. In Constantine Porphyrogenetos' *De Ceremoniis*, only one other *strategos* is recorded as having a similar arrangement – that of Mesopotamia. Indeed, that *strategos* receives no salary at all, “since he has all the customs dues”.⁶⁵¹ It is important to note that here, Mesopotamia does not refer to the ‘fertile crescent’ between the Tigris and the Euphrates, previously an imperial province which had been lost to Byzantium since the Arab conquests long before this work was written; rather, it refers to the *theme* of Mesopotamia, which was further north, in Anatolia, neighbouring Chaldaia.⁶⁵² The customs dues to which Porphyrogenetos refers, therefore, were no doubt derived from the same caravan routes which fed Trebizond, as the theme contained Theodosiopolis and likely also Artze, the famous wealth of which is discussed below. We can estimate the extent of these customs dues by comparison to the salaries of other *stratego*i; this would suggest that the *strategos* of Mesopotamia would be earning somewhere from 10-20 lbs of gold from the *Kommerkion* a year. Probably, the earnings would be towards the lower end of this range, as higher sums would indicate that the caravan towns earned greater tax revenue than the port of Trebizond, which seems unlikely; however, it certainly cannot be ruled out. In either event, it is clear that the wealth of the trade routes both around

⁶⁵¹ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *The Book of Ceremonies*, 697.

⁶⁵² Alexander Kazhdan, ‘Theme of Mesopotamia’, in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), vol 2., 1348.

and towards Trebizond produced tax harvest of some renown, giving an indication of the significance of these trade routes.

Returning to Trebizond itself, one aspect of particular importance to its economy was the city's role as a 'border town', hosting commercial exchanges between Muslim and Byzantine merchants. Al-Muqadassi called it the most important Muslim trade colony in Byzantium in the late 10th century.⁶⁵³ This role is also attested by both Al-Istakhri and Mas'ūdī in the 10th century, and again by Al-Idrisi in the 12th.⁶⁵⁴ In this capacity it was supported by several nearby caravan towns. Ardanoutzin (modern Ardanuç), in Tao, was one such town, noted by Constantine Porphyrogenetos:

The commerce of Trebizond and Iberia and Abasgia and the whole country of Armenia and Syria comes to it, and it has an enormous *Kommerkion* from this commerce... it is a key of Iberia and Abasgia and of the Mischians.⁶⁵⁵

Other important towns were Theodosiopolis (modern Erzurum), Artze and Ani, the wealth of which can be attested by many sources.⁶⁵⁶ Porphyrogenetos discussed the number of caravans which flooded Theodosiopolis, and noted its strong connections with Georgian merchants.⁶⁵⁷ Matthew of Edessa describes Artze as "renowned and populous... filled with an innumerable multitude of men and women and countless quantities of gold and silver.... it is superfluous to mention the quantities of gold, silver and brocades because it cannot be estimated".⁶⁵⁸ Attaleiates noted that Ani was particularly vulnerable to siege as "the inhabitants were merchants, inexperienced in military

⁶⁵³ Карпов, *История Трапезундской Империи*, 127.

⁶⁵⁴ Robert S. Lopez, 'The Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire', *Speculum* 20 (1945), 29; Defrémery, 'Fragments Géographes et d'historiens Arabes et Persans', 462; Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, trans. Meynard and Coureille, vol 1, 160; al-Idrisi, *Geographie*, translated by P. Amédée (Paris: L'imprimerie Royale, 1840), vol 2, 325-6 & 393-4; Al-Muqadassi, *Descriptio Imperii Moslemici*, ed. M J. de Goeje (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1877), 122.

⁶⁵⁵ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 216-7. Here, as in most Byzantine sources, Iberia refers to Caucasian Iberia, an eastern region of Georgia.

⁶⁵⁶ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 17.

⁶⁵⁷ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 208-9, 214-5.

⁶⁵⁸ Matthew of Edessa, *Armenia and the Crusades*, 76.

engineering and planning.”⁶⁵⁹ All this is indicative of a substantial caravan trade coming overland towards Trebizond’s markets.

However, it was not only Byzantine-Muslim trade which supported the booming economy of Trebizond and her caravan towns. Numerous merchants of diverse origins have been noted there. Georgian connections, with both Ardanoutzin and especially Theodosiopolis, were noted by Constantine Porphyrogenetos.⁶⁶⁰ Mas’ūdī commented additionally on Armenians and Circassians.⁶⁶¹ There is a possibility of Rus’ merchants also. The town is not on either of their primary routes (the Volga route or the Dnieper route), and there are no sources suggesting they visited the town during their heyday in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. However, Ibn al-Athir makes an interesting comment about events during the years 1205-6:

During this year Ghiyath al-Din Khusroshah, ruler of Anatolia [*Kaykhusraw I, sultan of the Seljuqs of Rum*] prepared for an expedition to Trebizond. He besieged its ruler because he had abandoned his allegiance. He blockaded him closely and for that reason the routes, both by land and by sea, from Anatolia, from the Rus’, the Qipjaq and others were interrupted. None of these came into Ghiyath al-Din’s territory and the people suffered huge damage on account of that, because they used to carry on commerce with them and enter their lands. Merchants from Syria, Iraq, Mosul and the Jazira and elsewhere used to visit them. A great host of them now gathered in the city of Sivas and since the road did not open, they suffered considerable harm. Fortunate indeed were those who retained their initial capital.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁹ Attaleiates, *The History*, 149.

⁶⁶⁰ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio* 208-9 & 214-7.

⁶⁶¹ Mas’ūdī, *Les Prairies d’Or*, trans. Meynard and Coureille, vol 1, 160.

⁶⁶² Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol 3, 113.

Al-Athir could simply be referring to Rus' as a generic northern province or people; however, the separate identification of Qipjaqs makes this unlikely, quite aside from the long-established connections between the Islamic world. It seems most likely therefore that Al-Athir is referring to the Kievan Rus'. The text is equivocal – "routes from the Rus'" is not necessarily indicative of Rus' merchants travelling to Trebizond, but there is no reason to assume that such a well-travelled and mercantile people would refuse to make such a journey themselves. As a result, this might be the only written evidence of Rus' merchants travelling to Trebizond during our period. Mas'ūdī's description of the fairs of the 10th century does not include mention of Rus' merchants.⁶⁶³ In addition, although Yngvar's expedition may have reached Georgia (as discussed above), it does not appear to have travelled via Trebizond. Given the date of Al-Athir's extract, the Rus' may have only started trading in Trebizond after the fall of Constantinople; they would have needed a new port on the south of the Black Sea to make the Dnieper trade viable. Trebizond may have filled that role, or this may have been a short-term arrangement which swiftly passed away, with Rus' merchants terminating their journey in the Crimea, as noted by William of Rubruck.⁶⁶⁴

Nonetheless, there are other, indirect indications that the Rus' may have been trading in Trebizond from an earlier date. This is indicated by the presence of the Qipjaqs, one community which did engage in long-term trade with Trebizond, throughout our period. They are attested at both the beginning of our period (by Mas'ūdī) and the end (by Al-Athir).⁶⁶⁵ Moreover, Mas'ūdī indicates that they travelled to Trebizond not by land but by sea: "their sea is not far from the country of Trebizond and that a constant navigation and trade are kept up between them and this city."⁶⁶⁶ Given that the Qipjaqs, as a nomadic people, did not engage in seafaring in any significant capacity, it seems very unlikely that they pursued a sea-based trade route for two centuries; however, while Al-Athir merely asserts that

⁶⁶³ Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, trans. Pellat, vol 1, 174.

⁶⁶⁴ William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, 68.

⁶⁶⁵ Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol 3, 113; Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, trans. Pellat, vol 1, 174. Mas'ūdī denotes the Qipjaqs using the word كَشَك, "kishk".

⁶⁶⁶ Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, trans. Pellat, vol 1, 174.

there are “routes [to Trebizond] from the Qipjaq”, Mas’ūdī states explicitly that “there is a fair once a year at which merchants assemble from all nations: Muslims, Byzantines, Armenians and others from the country of Kashak [i.e. Qipjaqs]”.⁶⁶⁷ Thus, whether it was Qipjaqs themselves, braving the ocean on hired ships, or merely non-Qipjaq agents charged with their affairs, cannot be ascertained. It may well have been a mixture of both. Noonan suggests that most intermediaries were Islamic merchants; however, given the continual trade relationships between Rus’ and Qipjaqs during this period, the use of Rus’ as agents is also quite probable.⁶⁶⁸ An argument in favour of Rus’ agents is Mas’ūdī’s use of the phrase “their sea” [i.e. the Qipjaqs’]. This, presumably, is a different sea from the Sea of the Rus’, which Mas’ūdī refers to elsewhere.⁶⁶⁹ It may well refer to the Sea of Azov, where, as we have seen, the Rus’ had trading interests – the ‘Salt Route’ (Kiev-Azov) was one of the three routes “of our fathers” on which the Rus’ prince was worried about Qipjaq depredations.⁶⁷⁰ Alternatively, “their sea” may refer to the waters around the Crimea; Ibn al-Athir describes Sudaq as “the city of the Qipjaqs, from where they trade”, although this is much later.⁶⁷¹ In either case, the Rus’ were excellently placed to deal with prospective Qipjaq merchants or mercantile demands, and thus seem to be one of the most likely candidates for providing the Qipjaqs with maritime transport.

It is also tempting to view connections between the Rus’ and Georgia as indicative of connections via Trebizond; as has been established elsewhere, Trebizond was the primary port of Georgia and the Transcaucasian region during this period. Yngvar’s expedition, which travelled by river to the region, would be a notable exception to such a pattern.⁶⁷² The *Paterik* of the Caves Monastery in Kiev mentions the presence of an Armenian doctor who (somewhat ambiguously) “was better than any of

⁶⁶⁷ Mas’ūdī, *Les Prairies d’Or*, trans. Pellat, vol 1, 174.

⁶⁶⁸ Noonan, ‘Rus’, Pechenegs, and Polovtsy’, 325 and *passim*.

⁶⁶⁹ Mas’ūdī, *Les Prairies d’Or*, vol 1, trans. Pellat, 216.

⁶⁷⁰ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 325.

⁶⁷¹ Richards, *Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol 3, 222-3.

⁶⁷² For analysis of Trebizond as the primary port for merchants of the Transcaucasia region, see the discussion beginning on 117, above.

his predecessors”; whether this is indicative of other Armenians present in Kiev is unclear.⁶⁷³ More interestingly, in 1080, the *Paterik* notes visiting Greek merchants and iconographers were accompanied by “Abkhazian” merchants. These merchants had “made the trip with” the Greeks; whether this refers to the whole journey from Constantinople, or simply the leg from Cherson, this is indicative of Caucasian merchants reaching Kiev by sea, suggesting an embarkation point of Trebizond (whether directly to the Crimea, or to Constantinople first).⁶⁷⁴

Certainly, during the twelfth century, the Rus’-Georgian connection blossomed. Vladimir Monomach’s expulsion of the Qipjaqs from Rus’ to the Caucasus may well have been done with the assistance of Davit the Restorer, as part of a Kiev-Georgian alliance.⁶⁷⁵ In 1154, the first Rus’-Georgian marriage alliance took place.⁶⁷⁶ Given the importance placed on the merchant-class during the expansion of the Georgian state, it seems highly likely that this relationship grew strong on the back of a Kiev-Tbilisi trade network.⁶⁷⁷ However, we must be cautious – Rus’-Georgian trade could just as easily have gone through the Caucasus mountains (i.e. the Volga route), as via the Black Sea, from Trebizond to Cherson or Azov. The probability of Rus’-Georgian co-operation in other matters, does not assure us of Rus’ presence in Trebizond, and therefore of Rus’ involvement in the eastern Black Sea.

Another important connection for Trebizond was its links with the Crimea, and Cherson. At the end of our period, these links were very strong. Crimea would be subject to the Empire of Trebizond, and was known as its ‘perateia’, or overseas territories.⁶⁷⁸ In 1223, war would break out between Trebizond and the Seljuqs over control of the Crimea and its trade.⁶⁷⁹ However, these commercial links do not appear to have been as strong at the beginning of our period. Mas’ūdī does not specify

⁶⁷³ *Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery*, 148.

⁶⁷⁴ Noonan, ‘Rus’, Pechenegs and Polovtsy’, 312.

⁶⁷⁵ Lau, ‘Multilateral Co-Operation in the Black Sea in the Late Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries’, 32.

⁶⁷⁶ Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*, 326.

⁶⁷⁷ For the importance of merchants to the growing Georgian state, see the discussion in chapter 3, page 142ff.

⁶⁷⁸ Interestingly, this term may also have included Anatolian lands usually approached by sea, rather than land, such as Sinope. Bryer, ‘A Byzantine Family: The Gabrades’, 173.

⁶⁷⁹ Rosenqvist, *The Hagiographical Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond*, 310-311 & 435-6.

Chersonite or Crimean merchants among its fairs, although they may well have been covered under “Byzantine”.⁶⁸⁰ More problematic is the fact that, while *De Administrando* notes trade links between Anatolia and Cherson, Trebizond is never mentioned:

Three imperial agents must be sent: one to the coast of the province of the Armeniakoi, another to the coast of the province of Paphlagonia, and another to the coast of the province of the Boukellarioi, in order to take possession of all Chersonite ships and to impound the cargo and the ships.... moreover, these imperial agents must forbid the Paphlagonian and Boukellarian merchant-ships and coastal vessels of Pontus to cross to Cherson with grain or wine or any other needful commodity or merchandise.... If grain does not pass across from Amisos and from Paphlagonia and the Boukellarioi and the flanks of the Armeniakoi, the Chersonites cannot live.⁶⁸¹

The absence of Chaldia (the Theme in which Trebizond was located) from these lists of trading partners is notable. It is possible that “Pontus” was used to cover the appropriate region, but such a usage was outdated by Porphyrogennetos’ time, as the theme of Chaldia had been extant since at least 840; moreover, Porphyrogennetos uses the name Chaldia on multiple other occasions in *De Administrando Imperio*.⁶⁸² On the other hand, the presence of pepper and Parthian/Scarlet leather in Cherson, heading north to the Pechenegs, is strongly indicative of naval connections with Trebizond, where pepper could be sourced from Silk Road merchants and Parthian leather from the Islamic world.⁶⁸³ It is possible therefore that even at this early stage there were Trapezuntine-Chersonite connections,

⁶⁸⁰ Mas’ūdī, *Les Prairies d’Or*, trans. Pellat, vol 1, 160. “Byzantine” is denoted by the word الروم, “Rum”, which could certainly include Chersonites, and indeed much more, for which see Jacoby, ‘Byzantine Trade with Egypt’, 27-29.

⁶⁸¹ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 286-7.

⁶⁸² For example, when discussing Kolonia and the county of Keltzin, which “was under Chaldia”. Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 238-9

⁶⁸³ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 52-53.

Porphrogennetos' omission of Chaldia notwithstanding. Unfortunately, source material enabling us to assess more accurately Cherson's links with Trebizond in this period, is lacking. We must content ourselves with saying it is highly probable that these two Euxine trading centres had strong connections, and the presence of the land-based Qipjaqs in both increases this likelihood.

Thus we have a wide range of merchants visiting Trebizond during our period: Constantinopolitans, Georgians, Armenians, Qipjaqs, Islamic merchants, Silk Road merchants, probably Chersonites, possibly Rus'. We can now examine what all these merchants were buying. One set of exciting commodities came under the catch-all heading 'spices' – aromatics, dyeing materials, flavourings and the like. Here, Trebizond played the role of outlet for the Silk Road. This trade may have declined during the 12th Century (a proposition which will be discussed in more detail below); however, in c. 1080, Attaleiates still noted that Artze, one of Trebizond's caravan towns, was filled with all types of goods and wares that were produced in "Persia, India and the rest of Asia", suggesting strong connections with the east persisted during the 11th century.⁶⁸⁴ Many of these goods would have gone on to Constantinople. The *Book of the Eparch* suggests a strong market for these products in the Queen of Cities, under the control of the *μυρεψοί*, or 'perfume sellers'.⁶⁸⁵ In addition, the presence of pepper in Chersonite markets suggests that Trapezuntine merchants also exported their exotic eastern products to the Crimea.⁶⁸⁶ We may also note at this point a rune-stick found near Bergen, in Norway, recording a shipment of pepper from Þorkell the Moneyer, dateable to the late 12th or early 13th century; whilst we cannot be entirely certain of where Þorkell obtained this pepper, Cherson or Trebizond seem very likely possibilities.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁴ Attaleiates, *The History*, 270-71; Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 17.

⁶⁸⁵ *The Book of the Eparch*, 39.

⁶⁸⁶ Constantine Porphyrogennetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 52-3.

⁶⁸⁷ *SRTD*, N651. Of course, we cannot entirely rule out the Volga route as a possible source for this pepper, although this becomes increasingly unlikely as the Black Sea developed.

Textiles were another key commodity available in Trebizond, in regard to its positions both on the Silk Road and the Byzantine-Arab border. Much of the silk manufactured or processed in Constantinople would have been sourced from Georgia via Trebizond.⁶⁸⁸ Contemporary sources praise Trebizond on account of the textiles and clothing to be bought there. Al-Istakhri wrote that “all the textiles of Greek manufacture, all the brocades imported into Muslim territory are carried through Trebizond.”⁶⁸⁹ In addition, the presence of Qipjaqs suggests a further addition to this market. Mas’ūdī describes their clothes as follows:

In their country [i.e. Cumania] there are various kinds of cloth made of a linen of a kind called *Tala*, finer than *Dabiki*, and more lasting in wear. A garment of this stuff fetches as much as ten dinars. They are carried to the adjoining Islamic countries. These cloths are brought from nearby countries, but cannot be compared with those of the Qipjaqs.⁶⁹⁰

Since the Qipjaqs exported this *Tala*, it was likely available in Trebizond, where we know they ventured for trade. In return, they would have bought foreign linens of their own: “Rumi brocade, and siklatun-scarlet, and various kinds of gold-embroidered brocade”.⁶⁹¹ Certainly ‘Rumi’ products would have come from a Byzantine port; siklatun-scarlet is attested in Cherson and may well also have been available in Trebizond – Porphyrogenetos uses the word “Parthian” to describe scarlet, giving an indication of its putative provenance.⁶⁹² In addition, Constantinopolitan merchants would have imported Islamic, non-silken fabrics from here; the *Book of the Eparch* mentions the import of fabrics from Baghdad by Syrian merchants; as Trebizond was the main trading-city between the Islamic world

⁶⁸⁸ Jacoby, ‘Constantinople as a Commercial Transit Centre’, 196.

⁶⁸⁹ Defrémery, ‘Fragments géographiques et d’historiens Arabes et Persans’, 462.

⁶⁹⁰ Serjeant, ‘Material for a History of Islamic Textiles’, 10, 103; Mas’ūdī, *Les Prairies d’Or*, vol 2, trans. Meynard and Coureille, 45-6.

⁶⁹¹ Serjeant, ‘Material for a History of Islamic Textiles’ 10, 103.

⁶⁹² Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 52-3. The word is “πάρικα”.

and Byzantium, presumably many of these would have travelled on the Black Sea from Trebizond.⁶⁹³

The textile trade of Trebizond was obviously diverse and lively.

Rus', Qipjaq, Chersonite and other customers from the north would have gained access to the goods of Georgia and the east in Trebizond. We may consider wine and fruit; these were abundantly available in Georgia before and after the *Didi Turkoba*, and the *Russian Primary Chronicle* attests to their import to Russia from "Greece".⁶⁹⁴ Whether or not Svyatoslav's "Greece" included Trebizond, his comments in the *Chronicle* attest to a market for such products in the northern reaches of the Black Sea trade network, of which Trapezuntine merchants could certainly have taken advantage. In return, they could have shipped forest products southwards – beaver and otter furs, among other skins, are attested in Tbilisi.⁶⁹⁵ Slaves would also have been a popular commodity.⁶⁹⁶ Constantine Porphyrogenetos notes the export by Chersonites to the western coasts of the Black Sea of hides and wax; it seems probable that these goods could also have been shipped eastward; however, if so, they would have had to compete with Georgian wax and apiculture products.⁶⁹⁷

Clearly, Trebizond was home to bustling and diverse markets during the 11th and 12th centuries. Its merchants came from all around, and sold a range of goods, both exotic and luxurious. Trebizond did not only act as a terminus for the silk road; nor was it simply a border-town connecting Byzantium with its neighbours. It was truly a centre of trade, attracting merchants from north and south, east and west.

⁶⁹³ Lopez, 'The Silk Industry', 29; *The Book of the Eparch*, 29-31, 239-240.

⁶⁹⁴ *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 86; Metreveli, *The Golden Age*, 99 & 102; Mariam Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 13 & 29.

⁶⁹⁵ Lordkipanidze, *Georgia in the XI-XII centuries*, 39.

⁶⁹⁶ Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 52-3.

⁶⁹⁷ The term used for hides, βυσσάρια, refers specifically to leatherwork, and thus probably excludes otherwise-likely possibility of furs. Constantine Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando Imperio*, 112; Metreveli, *The Golden Age*, 102 & 160.

Seljuq Shakedown: a decline in Trapezuntine trade?

With this context in mind, we can now address the argument that Trebizond declined during the 11th and 12th centuries, as propounded by Jacoby. In brief, his argument is as follows: previously Trebizond had connected Byzantium with the trade routes heading overland, south of the Caspian Sea, to and from India. From the subcontinent, and the far east more generally, came aromatics, dying materials, and various other expensive goods. However, Trebizond's role in this trade declined in the late tenth and through the eleventh centuries. In the years after the Fatimid conquest of Egypt in 969, a combination of political turmoil in the middle east and policies favourable to trade in Fatimid lands caused the Silk Roads to largely redirect southwards, through the Persian Gulf, to the Nile Valley and the markets of Cairo and Alexandria.⁶⁹⁸ Thus Egypt became the major outlet where western merchants could buy eastern goods.⁶⁹⁹

Such an argument is plausible. Byzantine merchants are documented making what Jacoby describes as "massive" purchases of spices in Alexandria from 1035 and after. Continuous trading in Egypt by individual merchants are certainly datable to the early 12th century, and possibly earlier. However, as we have seen, Trebizond was the centre of a web of trade networks extending to and from all points of the compass; this diversity of trade allowed it to absorb the loss of any individual trade-pattern and still remain strong. The decline of Silk Road trade would not necessarily lead to a drastic decline in Trebizond's prospects. The range of other goods, mentioned above, would still have provided Trebizond with a robust trade. Even silk itself could still have been sourced from neighbouring Georgia. It may be true that the Silk Roads were redirected southwards during the 12th century; however, it does not follow that Trebizond suffered a substantial decline as a result.

⁶⁹⁸ Jacoby, 'Byzantine Trade with Egypt', 30-31; Jacoby, 'Constantinople as Commercial Transit Center', 195-6.

⁶⁹⁹ Jacoby, 'Byzantine Trade with Egypt', 42-5.

Thus arguments for a decline in Trapezuntine trade are even less convincing than are those regarding the Dnieper trade. Trebizond's success as a merchant-emporium was due in no small part to the diversity of its clientele and products; this has the unexpected effect of making it harder to quantify the town's wealth. The trade routes were not dominated by a single mercantile group, whose exploits can be used as a proxy-measure for the town's success; Trebizond did not produce any unique goods of its own, the export of which could be tracked and measured over time; nor did it produce its own coins until the late 13th century, long after the establishment of the Empire of Trebizond, which would have allowed for numismatic analysis.⁷⁰⁰ As a result, we are forced to rely more-or-less entirely on narrative accounts to track the town's growth or decline.

We can firstly dismiss the 'Blockade' hypothesis (above) with regards to Trebizond, just as we can with regard to the Dnieper trade. Qipjaqs are recorded as visiting merchants to Trebizond as early as the 10th century by Mas'ūdī (under the name "Kashak"), and again in the 13th by Al-Athir.⁷⁰¹ If this is the case, then Qipjaq expansion, although it may have cut the Rus' off from the Black Sea, would not have hindered Trebizond's trade as its customers would still have access to the town.

The Seljuqs, on the other hand, posed a much more severe problem. There can be no doubt that their advance in the 11th century caused problems for trade in eastern Anatolia. The havoc of war, the slaughter of civilians and livestock, and the exodus of survivors, do not make for ideal trading conditions.⁷⁰² However, Trebizond remained in Byzantine (or at least, not Seljuq) hands throughout the whole period. This does not mean Trebizond was unaffected. Indeed, as we have seen, Trebizond relied on her connections with the nearby caravan towns of Artze, Theodosiopolis and Ardanoutzin (among others) to maintain her wealth.⁷⁰³ All three of these towns fell into Seljuq hands, in 1049

⁷⁰⁰ Rabinowitz, Sedikova and Henneberg, 'Daily Life in a Provincial Late Byzantine City', 450.

⁷⁰¹ Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, vol 1, trans. Pellat, 160 & 174.

⁷⁰² For more details on Seljuq damage to trade and the economy of eastern Byzantium, see the section beginning on page 107..

⁷⁰³ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor*, 17 & 86.

(sacked), c. 1071 (occupied), and 1080 (burned/destroyed), respectively.⁷⁰⁴ Naturally, the loss of these important trading posts affected Trebizond's 'mercantile intake'. Attaleiates notes that the raids of the Seljuqs were a misfortune shared by "Iberia... and its neighbours, Mesopotamia, Chaldia [the Theme which included Trebizond], Melitene [and] Koloneia".⁷⁰⁵

Mas'ūdī notes that Trebizond's merchant-economy revolved around fairs.⁷⁰⁶ The most important one of these was the fair of the patron saint of Trebizond, the Panegyris of St. Eugenios. This festival was first observed during the reign of Basil I, but the government ceased official observation of the festival at the end of the eleventh century, due to Seljuq incursions.⁷⁰⁷

This decline only appears to have been temporary, however. The later 12th century sees some more positive indicators for Trapezuntine trade. For example, the first record of a Jewish merchant at Trebizond is made in 1188; the colophon of a bible-scroll records its purchase from "the community of our brethren the *kahal* of Țirapzīn".⁷⁰⁸ Certainly, by the early 13th century, trade in Trebizond was booming. Ibn al-Athir's comments (regarding the range of merchants, and their significant capital losses) have been noted above, as has the Georgian involvement in the establishment of the Empire of Trebizond, motivated in part by mercantile desires. To these, we can add Ibn Hawqal's testimony that Trebizond gained 10 quintals of gold a year from tax on trade in the early 13th century.⁷⁰⁹ Clearly, by the time of the 1205 siege, Trebizond was as successful as it ever had been before.

⁷⁰⁴ Attaleiates, *The History*, 270-1; Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 310; 'The Life of David, King of Kings', 171; Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor*, 86.

⁷⁰⁵ Attaleiates, *The History*, 143. Again, 'Iberia' here refers to a region of Georgian region, rather than the Iberian peninsula.

⁷⁰⁶ Mas'ūdī, *Les Prairies d'Or*, trans. Pellat vol 1, 160.

⁷⁰⁷ Vryonis, *Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor*, 15 and n82; A. Papadopoulous-Kerameus, *Сборникъ источниковъ по истории трапезундской империи* '[Sourcebook on the History of the Empire of Trebizond]' (St. Petersburg: V. Kirshbaum, 1897), 57-9.

⁷⁰⁸ Previously, Radhanite merchants had travelled the northern circuits, and Genizah merchants the south, but neither group had visited Trebizond. See Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, 67; and Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean*, 107 & 301-2. For the colophon, see Zvi Ankori, *Karaites in Byzantium: The Formative Years, 970-1100* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1959), 122-5

⁷⁰⁹ Карпов, *История Трапезундской Империи*, 127.

At some stage between the ceasing of the Panegyris, c.1100, and the 1205 siege, Trebizond's trade had recovered. Lacking intermediate data points, however, it is hard to measure the rapidity of this recovery. Certainly, if the only cause of decline was Seljuq attacks, then the recovery would have been relatively rapid once they ceased to be a threat. The Komnenian Restoration, in particular the successful campaigns of John II (c. 1120-1140), would provide some timescale on this. In nearby Georgia, the *Didi Turkoba* was certainly over by the time of the death of Davit IV in 1125. Another contribution to this revitalized trade would have been the 'mercantilisation' of the previously destructive Seljuqs. As the situation in Anatolia stabilized, various new Turkish princedoms began to engage in more peaceful relationships with their neighbours. It became apparent that more money could be made by taxing trade than by simple loot-and-burn tactics. It is hard to date precisely when this economic shift took place. Leiser argues that Seljuq "entrance into international commercial relations" began "chiefly in the last years of Qilij Arslan II (1156-92)".⁷¹⁰

However, there is some evidence of Turkic involvement in trade earlier than this. In the *Kartlis*, there is a brief reference to "the Turks who arrived with caravans", and "a large caravan, accompanied by many Turks", which arrived at Tbilisi.⁷¹¹ The events described took place before Davit's recapture of Tbilisi (although the narrative is a little convoluted), suggesting a date before 1122, and certainly before 1125, when Davit died. The importance, or not, of this reference depends on whether one can interpret this as a reference to Turks trading. The Turks in question are undoubtedly Seljuq, not Qipjaq, judging by their later actions as well as their location. Whether their presence with the caravans was mercantile or mercenary is unclear; they may have been providing military protection to the caravans against raiders or thieves. The relevant verb in the *Kartlis* is "შემოყოლა", "shemoq'ola", or "შემოჰყვა", "shemohq'va".⁷¹² This means 'to follow or accompany', potentially 'to escort'; however,

⁷¹⁰ Gary Leiser, ed. *A History of the Seljuqs - İbrahim Kafesoğlu's interpretation and the resulting controversy* (Carbondale, IL: South Illinois University Press, 1988), 111-2.

⁷¹¹ 'Life of David, King of Kings', 184; Thomson, *The Georgian Chronicles*, 340.

⁷¹² 'Kartlis Cxovreba', The Titus Text Retrieval Engine, <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/cauc/ageo/kcx1/kcx1.htm>, 349.

it does not distinctly separate the Turks from the caravan itself, for us to conclusively say that these Seljuqs were not also merchants in their own right. Certainly, their seizure of Christians from Tbilisi does not seem conducive to good customer relations; however, if they had come only to trade with the Muslim inhabitants of the then-Muslim-controlled city, their seizure of slaves may not have prevented their mercantile desires. Once again, the text is too ambiguous to be sure.

Other references to early Turkish trade are available in Choniates who, though usually disinterested in commerce, provides several indications of Seljuq-Byzantine trade. His earliest reference to Christians trading with Turks appears as early as 1142, during the reign as John Komnenos, when Choniates describes how the inhabitants of the islands of Lake Pousgouse (Beyşehir?) “crossed to Ikonion in their barks and light boats, and by mingling with the Turks, not only strengthened their mutual bonds of friendship but also maintained strong commercial ties.”⁷¹³ However, unlike Choniates’ other examples, this appears to be semi-domestic trade – they are Christians, but not Romans; they are under the rule of the Sultan. This, therefore, is possibly indicative of an interest in local trade, but not the long-distance trade which would allow the neighbours of the Seljuqs to equally flourish.

Later on, however, Choniates recounts the exploits of Constantine Frangopoulos, an imperially-sanctioned Byzantine pirate who plied the Black Sea in the year 1200. The precise location of his activity is unclear: He was sent to the Black Sea

...ostensibly to investigate the cargo of a certain ship which had shipwrecked somewhere near Kerasous while navigating the Phasis River down to Byzantium; in actuality he was to attack the merchantmen that sailed down to the city of Amisos and plunder their wares. According to the imperial command, as he made his way up the Euxine, he spared not a single ship but despoiled all merchantmen, as many

⁷¹³ Choniates, *Historiae*, 37; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 22.

as were making for Byzantion laden with wares, as well as those that had discharged their cargoes and were on their way back after taking on fresh merchandise.⁷¹⁴

It seems likely that the reference to the Phasis river is a misnomer. The mouth of the Phasis was at the town of the same name (now called Poti), in the Caucasus, several hundred miles by coast from Kerasous (now Giresun). Moreover, Phasis was not a major port at the time, according to the late 12th-century *Liber de Existencia Riveriarum*, and other Genoese portulans.⁷¹⁵ Thus a trip from Phasis to Constantinople via Kerasous seems unlikely, even as a convenient pretext for the emperor to use – for why would the ship not have stopped at Trebizond? A likely explanation for such a choice is the antique connotations of the name Phasis, which is linked with the myth of Jason and the Argonauts; this may have enticed the flowery-penned Choniates to use that name in place of a more common or accurate one – just as he uses Byzantion in place of Constantinople. Such details hardly matter, however, as Choniates leaves it unclear if Frangopoulos even reaches Amisos, let alone the eastern portions of the Black Sea.

Some of the merchants Frangopoulos despoiled were from Ikonion.⁷¹⁶ However, we cannot be sure where they entered the Black Sea – Sinope, Amisos, Kerasous and Trebizond are all possible; we only know that they were probably sailing to or from Constantinople. However, we do know that in a 2-month span, Frangopoulos robbed enough merchants for the Sultan to intervene, and to demand recompense for them. The value of their lost goods was settled at 50 silver minae.⁷¹⁷ This was to be

⁷¹⁴ Choniates, *Historiae*, 528; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 290.

⁷¹⁵ Jacoby, 'An unpublished Medieval portolan of the Mediterranean in Minneapolis', 65-69.

⁷¹⁶ Interestingly, although Magoulias' translation does not acknowledge it, the phrasing suggests that these merchants *first* appealed to the Byzantine emperor, before seeking justice from the Sultan of Ikonion; immediately after despoiled merchants have been denied redress by Alexios, Choniates says: "Οἱ ἐξ Ἰκονίου τοῖνυν ὀρμώμενοι ἔμποροι τῷ Ρουκνατίνῳ προσίασι". This perhaps implies the existence of some trade-treaty between the two states allowing for redress, although that may be an over-attentive reading of a nuance. Choniates, *Historiae*, 528.

⁷¹⁷ Choniates, *Historiae*, 529; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 290.

paid in addition to the annual tribute of 300 minae.⁷¹⁸ By way of comparison, Choniates says that the revived office of Praetor was paid at the rate of 40 and 80 silver coins a month.⁷¹⁹ This does not appear to have been a great amount of money; but it seems likely to have been the result of only a small number of merchants.

Choniates also refers to merchants from Ikonion in Constantinople in two years prior. When, in 1197, the Sultan of Ikonion waylaid some Arab stallions destined for the Emperor from Egypt, the emperor responded by throwing the merchants who had come from Ikonion – both Roman and Turk – into prison, and confiscating their goods. These merchants appear to have travelled by land, not by sea – they had pack animals.⁷²⁰ Presumably, this was the more common method of Byzantine-Seljuq trade, as the sultanate of Rum had no coastline (either Euxine or Mediterranean) before the Fall of Constantinople; however, the number of merchants involved in this second case appears limited, as the Emperor “scattered [their merchandise] among others and it vanished from sight”, an approach which is less likely to have been taken if the wealth involved were considerable. Thus the 50 minae lost to Frangopoulos may have represented a more substantial portion of Rum-Byzantine trade than it seems at first. Either way, it is noteworthy that the subjects of the Sultan were engaged in maritime trade so early.

Certainly, by the beginning of 13th century, the Seljuqs had truly come to take an interest in international trade. They had begun to build caravanserais, encouraging long-distance caravans to travel through their territory, attracting them to the key towns Theodosiopolis (which had already been a key caravan stop when under Byzantine control) and Sivas.⁷²¹ The earliest surviving caravanserai, located near Konya, is datable to the very late 12th century; however, they may have

⁷¹⁸ Choniates, *Historiae*, 461; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 253.

⁷¹⁹ Choniates, *Historiae*, 330; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 182.

⁷²⁰ Choniates, *Historiae*, 494; Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium*, 271-2. “ὑποζύγια” is the word in the Greek.

⁷²¹ Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor*, 222-3.

been constructed before then.⁷²² Ibn al-Athir noted that the siege of Trebizond did not only affect the merchants of that city, but also those in Seljuq lands: “None of these [merchants] came into Ghiyath al-Din’s territory and the people suffered huge damage on account of that, because they used to carry on commerce with them and enter their lands. Merchants from Syria, Iraq, Mosul and the Jazira and elsewhere used to visit them.”⁷²³ This gives some indication of the reach of Trebizond’s trading catchment, which clearly extended far through Seljuq territory. By 1223, the Seljuqs appear to have been trying to extend their hegemony, by engaging in trade wars with the Trapezuntine Empire over the Crimea, though any success they had would be cut short by the unhelpfully-timed arrival of Genghis Khan and the Mongols.⁷²⁴ Clearly, in the early 13th century, the Seljuqs had evolved beyond their aggressive nomadic origins, which had brought such terror to the inhabitants of Anatolia; instead, they had found a new, economic outlet for their aggression, which allowed merchants and sultans to prosper alike. Indeed, Gregoras records that, during the reign of John III Vatatzes of Nicaea (1222-54), a famine afflicted the Seljuqs, such that “the wealth of the Turks emptied itself in great abundance into the hands of the Byzantines: gold, silver, clothing and other things, whatever precious and luxury items in every form they had to offer”.⁷²⁵ Trade thus allowed the Seljuqs not only to prosper, but also to survive.

Therefore, we can accept the proposition that Trebizond’s trade would have suffered during the initial arrival of the Seljuqs during the 11th century. The damage to Trebizond’s neighbouring caravan towns would have naturally hindered trade between Trebizond and the merchants coming from her south and east. This difficulty presumably peaked around the turn of the 12th century, with the cancellation of Trebizond’s major trade fair. However, the city seems to have recovered relatively quickly. By the

⁷²² Kurt Erdmann and Hanna Erdmann, *Das Anatolische Karavansaray des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1976), 31-3.

⁷²³ Richards, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir*, vol 3, 113.

⁷²⁴ Claude Cahen, *Pre-Ottoman Turkey*, trans J. Jones-Williams (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1968), 94. Leiser, *History of the Seljuqs*, 111-2.

⁷²⁵ Gregoras, *Byzantinae Historiae*, Vol I, 42-43. Translation from Deno John Geanakoplos, ed, *Byzantium: Church, Society and Civilization Seen through Contemporary Eyes*(Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 248-9.

end of the 12th century, Trebizond is once again a prosperous merchant hub, despite Jacoby's claim that the city should be in decline due to the rerouting of the Silk Road. Thus we can assume that the impediment to Trebizond's success was exclusively the result of the Seljuq wars hindering her trade, and once the Seljuqs settled and became more welcoming to merchants, Trebizond could once again prosper. This should more accurately be described not as a decline, but an interruption of Trapezuntine trade. However, putting a precise timescale within this date-range for this transformation is near impossible, as there is no further source material.

iv. Conclusion

In summary, the Black Sea was – contrary to the arguments of many historians – a bustling and international trade centre during the 11th and 12th centuries. Its waters were criss-crossed by routes connecting the essential trade-triangle of Cherson-Constantinople-Trebizond; from this triangle extended long tendrils which linked Scandinavia, the Silk Road, Egypt and the Mediterranean, and even reached as far as the British Isles and the Indian subcontinent.⁷²⁶ These routes were travelled by merchants carrying furs, silks, textiles, jewellery and many other exotic and luxurious goods.

The evidence clearly shows that the Dnieper route was thriving throughout the two centuries under consideration. Whilst there may have been brief interruptions due to bellicose Qipjaq chiefs, these were anomalies, rather than the status quo. Numismatic evidence may cloud, rather than clarify, the situation; however, diverse written and archaeological sources indicate that the Dnieper route remained profitable throughout the 11th and 12th centuries.

⁷²⁶ Depending on one's view regarding artifacts such as the Goddard Coin, it may even be possible to extend this network across the Atlantic to pre-Columbian North America, although such a hypothesis is certainly slender and falls beyond the range of this thesis. Those wishing to research this topic could start with Svein H. Gullbeck, 'The Norse Penny Reconsidered: The Goddard Coin – Hoax or Genuine?', *Journal of the North Atlantic* 33 (2017), 1-8.

Similarly, though Trebizond's trade was upset by the arrival of the Seljuqs and the associated military upheavals, this was a temporary hiatus, rather than a symptom of longer-term decline. Despite lacunae in the source material, there is more than enough evidence to show that Trebizond's diverse trades left it capable of absorbing economic setbacks, be they raids of the Seljuqs, or redirections of the Silk Roads.

In both the Dnieper and Trapezuntine cases, passing disruptions have been mistaken for chronic economic contractions. Whilst the Black Sea may not yet have reached its apotheosis as the 'turntable of international trade' that it would become in the post-Mongol era, to dismiss it as a declining backwater for local merchants alone is clearly mistaken. A diverse and wide-ranging merchant class sailed the Euxine waters, coming from, and going to, all points of the compass, and all limits of their horizons.

Conclusion

In the year I started this thesis, Michel Balard, long-time patriarch of Medieval Black Sea studies, published an article, 'The Black Sea: Trade and Navigation (13th-15th Centuries)', in which he stated, simply and unequivocally:

Before the Fourth Crusade, the Black Sea had no international economic importance.⁷²⁷

This thesis has clearly demonstrated that this is inaccurate. Byzantines, Chersonites, Rus', Qipjaqs, Georgians, Seljuqs, Armenians and more concerned themselves with trade across the surface of its waters.

We have seen how control of strategical important resources in the north of the Black Sea was a key factor in the grand strategy of Byzantium's dealings with the West. Treaties with the Venetians and Genoese, regarding their access to the Black Sea, were, in part, dictated by their relationships with Byzantium's enemies – first the Norman Regno, and later the Holy Roman Empire. Repeated attempts by the Genoese ambassador Amico di Murta during the second half of the 12th century to overcome their exclusion from the northern reaches of the Black Sea were met with firm, continual denial. To the Genoese, access to these markets was clearly a matter of economic importance; to the Byzantines, a matter of imperial security.

We have also seen how the Black Sea provided a potentially valuable agricultural resource to Constantinople during a period where its cereal supply was particularly fragile. However, long-assumed patterns of grain import are in fact unsubstantiated; rather than being brought in small Rus' boats, grain from the Chernozem belt seems more likely to have travelled in larger, Chersonite ships – if, indeed, it ever reached Constantinople. Moreover, the excellent bounty of the Georgian fields,

⁷²⁷ Michel Balard, 'The Black Sea: Trade and Navigation (13th-15th-Centuries)', in *Maritimes Mittelalter: Meere als Kommunikationsräume*, ed. Michael Borgolte and Nikolas Jaspert (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2016), 182.

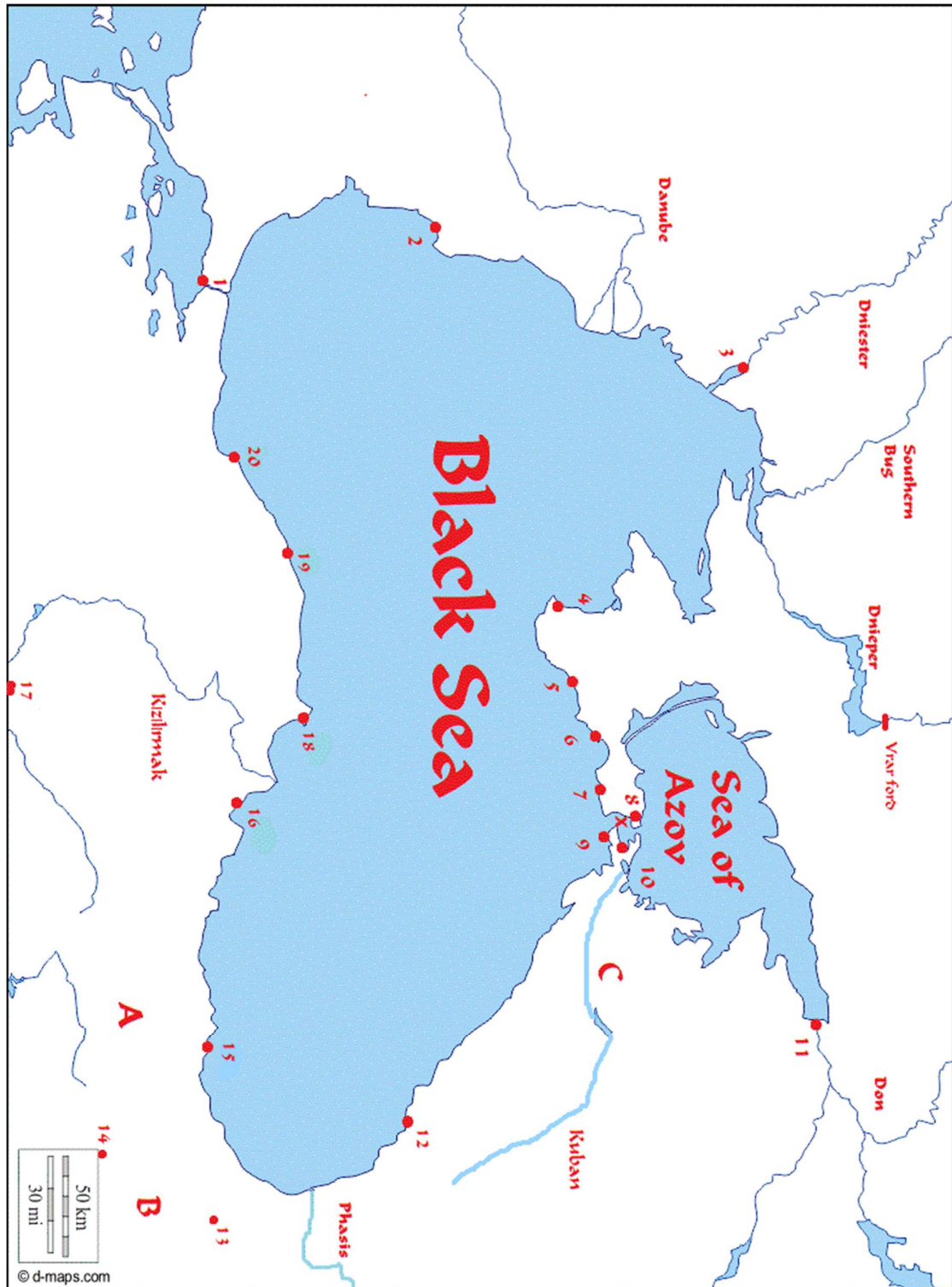
hitherto unrecorded in the Black Sea, can instead be traced through Trebizond, where it hid under other flags and names. Such trade cannot be properly explored based only on superficial reasoning and assumptions – instead, deep delving into the source material has uncovered significant alterations in the presumed trade patterns of the Euxine.

Finally, we have seen how the Black Sea carried commodities of great value and desirability – jewels, silks, reliquaries, furs, brocades, swords, slaves, and more besides – connecting customers from the furthest reaches of the Mediterranean world: goods which travelled on Euxine waters can be found throughout the Medieval world – Iceland, Egypt, Britain, Scandinavia, Libya and even India are some of their final destinations, but this represents only a fraction of the actual commodities which were transported across the Black Sea. Their traffickers included Rus’ and Varangians, Jews both itinerant and settled, Turks nomadic or well-housed, Chersonites and of course Byzantines.

With all this in mind one can hardly in good conscience state that the Black Sea had “no international economic importance” before 1204. On the contrary, during the 11th and 12th centuries, the Sea’s importance, both regional and international, was considerable. It had diplomatic, military and economic ramifications to nations both on its shores and far distant. To ignore or underestimate this sea in the economic and political life either of those on its shores, or those powers further beyond, is a severe mistake. Euxine trade was not restricted by the Euxine coasts – on the contrary, the Black Sea was a global sea, and the abundance of activity upon it made waves not only throughout the Mediterranean world, but also on far distant shores.

APPENDIX 1 – MAPS

1 - Map of the Black Sea

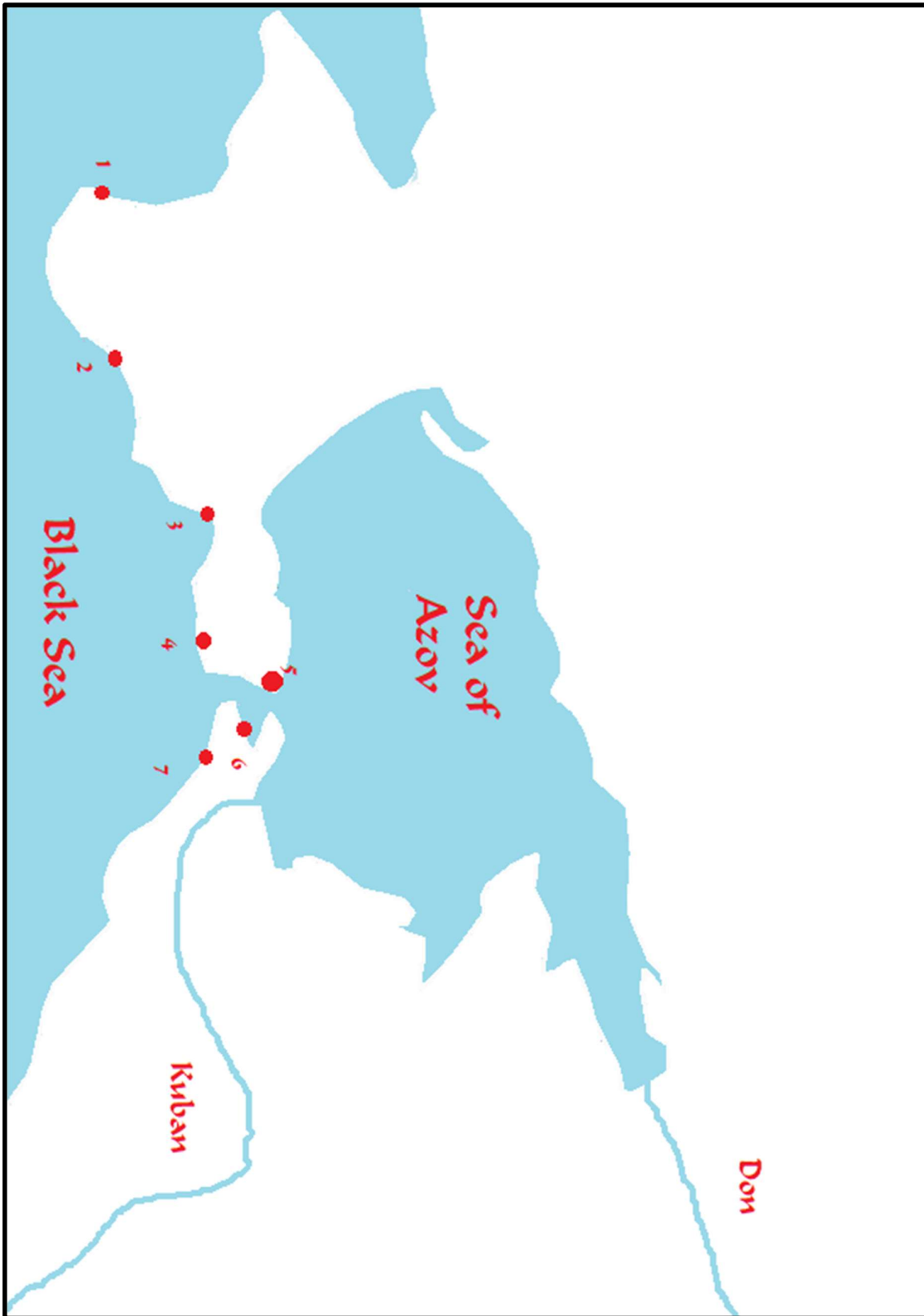


Number	Main Name (Modern Equivalent)	Alternatives
1	Constantinople (Istanbul)	Miklagarðr, Micklegarth, Byzantion, <i>Megalopolis</i> , Tsargrad
2	Varna	-
3	Maurocastron (Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy)	Tyras, Moncastro, Cetatea Alba, Akkerman
4	Cherson (Sevastopol)	-
5	Sudaq (Soldaia)	Sugdaiia
6	Caffa (Feodosia)	Theodosia
7	(Yakovenkove)	Rhōsia?
8	Bosporos (Kerch)	Vosporo; Rhōsia?
X	Straits of Kerch	Cimmerian Bosporos, 'Mouth of the Don'
9	(Veslovka)	-
10	(Taman)	Matracha? Tamatarcha, Tmutorokan, Matricia
11	Tana (Azov)	(Tanais)
12	Anakopia (Akhali Atoni)	New Athos
13	Ardanoutzin (Ardanuç)	-
14	Theodosiopolis (Erzurum)	Karno K'aghak, Artsn-Rum
15	Trebizond (Trabzon)	Trapezous, Trapezonta, T'rap'izoni,
16	Amisos (Samsun)	Amisons, Aminosos, Sampsonda, Enete, Pompeiopolis, Peiraios

17	Lake Nar Golu	<i>[slightly south of edge of map]-</i>
18	Sinope (Sinop)	Sinopolis
19	Amastris (Amasra)	-
20	Herakleia (Karadeniz Ereğli)	Heracleia Pontica, Pontoheraclea
	<i>[proposed locations of unknown naphtha wells]</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Dezerne well and Bayburt B. Gjuljabert/Üçyol location C. Region of Zichia, location of all other wells mentioned in <i>De Administrando Imperio</i>

All locations approximate. “?” indicates a hypothesized identification. See below for local maps for the Straits of Kerch, and the Georgia region including Tbilisi.

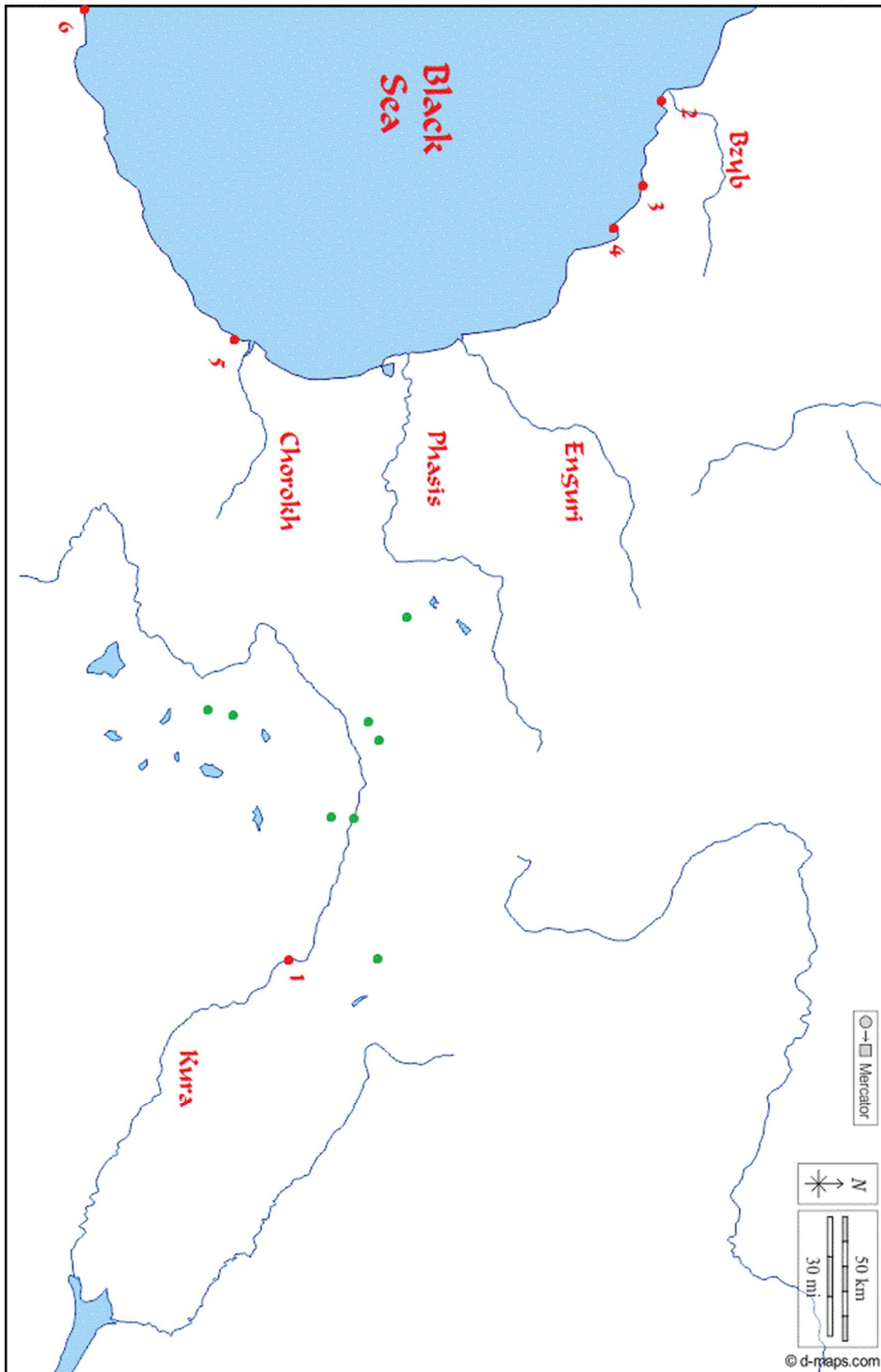
2- Map of the Straits of Kerch



Number	Name (Modern equivalent)	Alternatives
1	Cherson (Sevastopol)	-
2	Sudaq (Soldaia)	Sugdaia
3	(Feodosia)	Theodosia, Caffa
4	(Yakovenkove)	Rhōsia?
5	Bosporos (Kerch)	Vosporo; Rhōsia?
6	Matracha (Taman)	Tamatarcha, Tmutorokan, Matricia
7	Veselovka	-

Map not to scale. Course of Don and Kuban approximated.

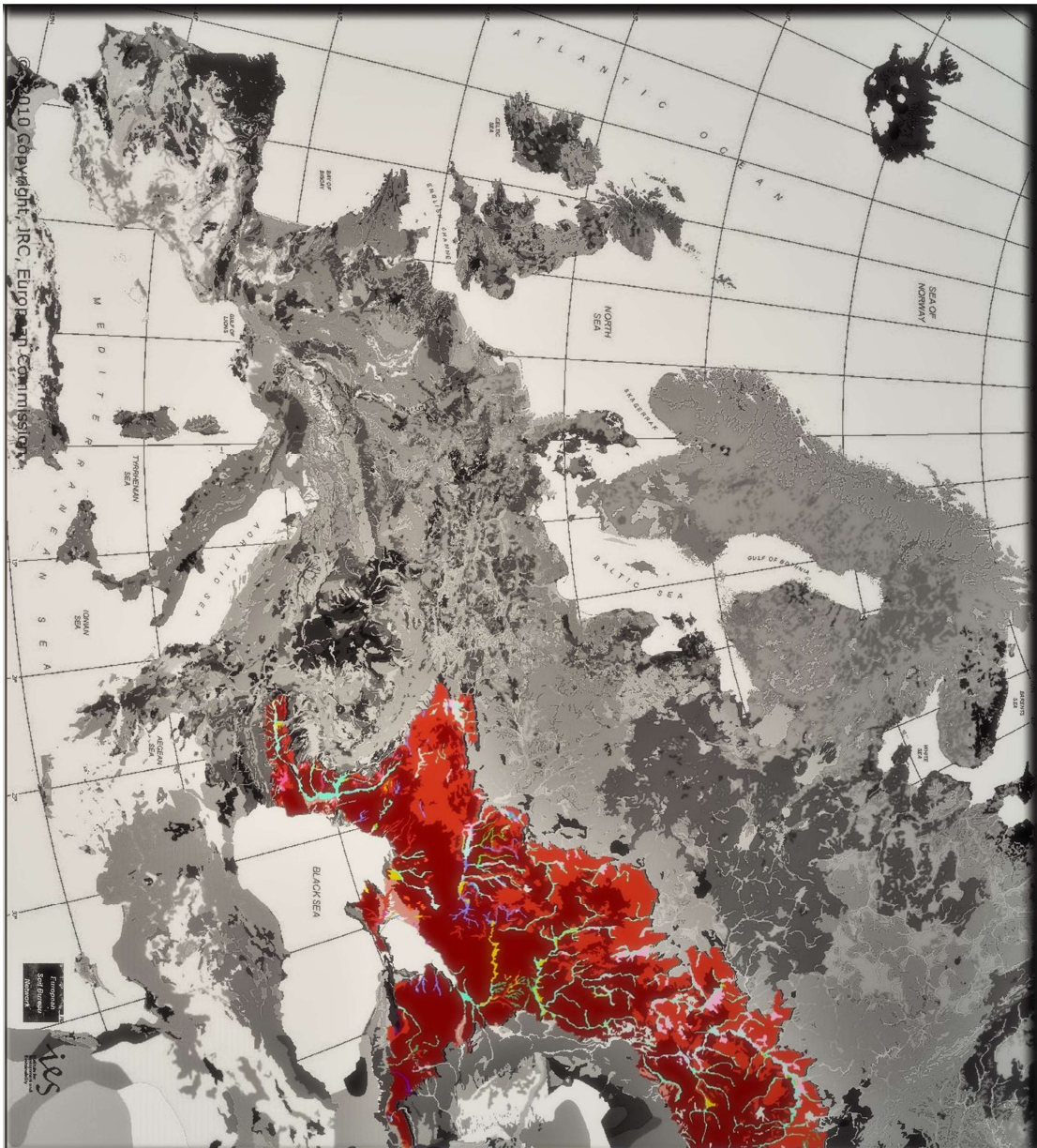
3 - Map of Georgia Region



Number	Name (Modern Equivalent)	Alternatives
1	(Tbilisi)	Tiflis, Kalak
2	Pezonda (Pitsunda)	Pityus
3	Anakopia (Akhali Atoni)	New Athos
4	Savastopolis (Sukhumi)	Aqwa
5	Gonio	-
6	Trebizond (Trabzon)	Trapezous, Trapezonta, T'rap'izoni

Green markers indicate the various towns and cities founded during Georgia's urbanization, as discussed on page 143-4.

4 - Chernozem Soils in Europe

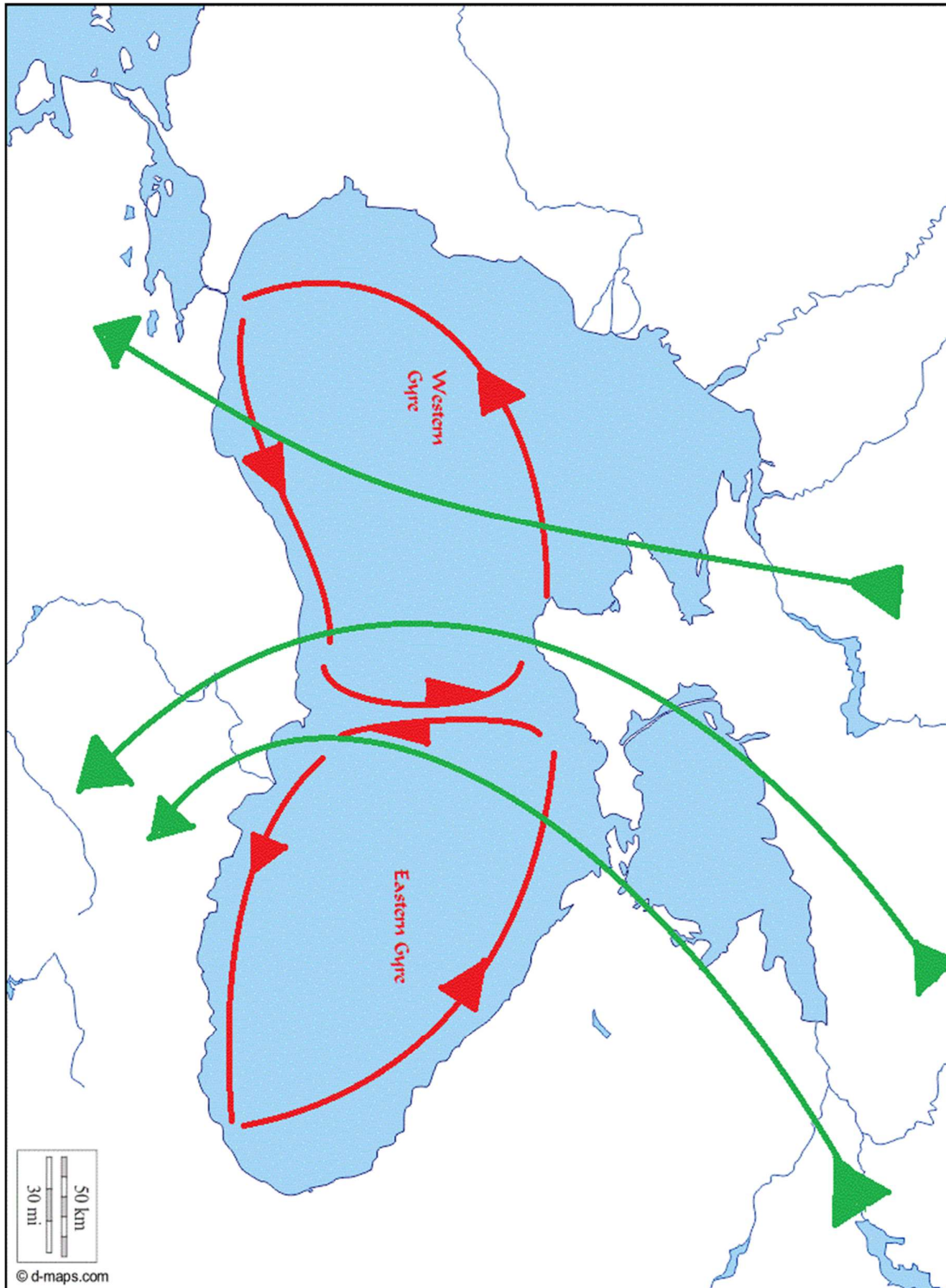


Soil map of Europe and western Asia. The colourised section indicates the approximate range of Chernozems (dark red) and Phaeozems (lighter red) soil.

“The Major Soil Types of Europe”, copyright European Commission, used under [Creative Commons License 2.5](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/). Image cropped, desaturated and recoloured.

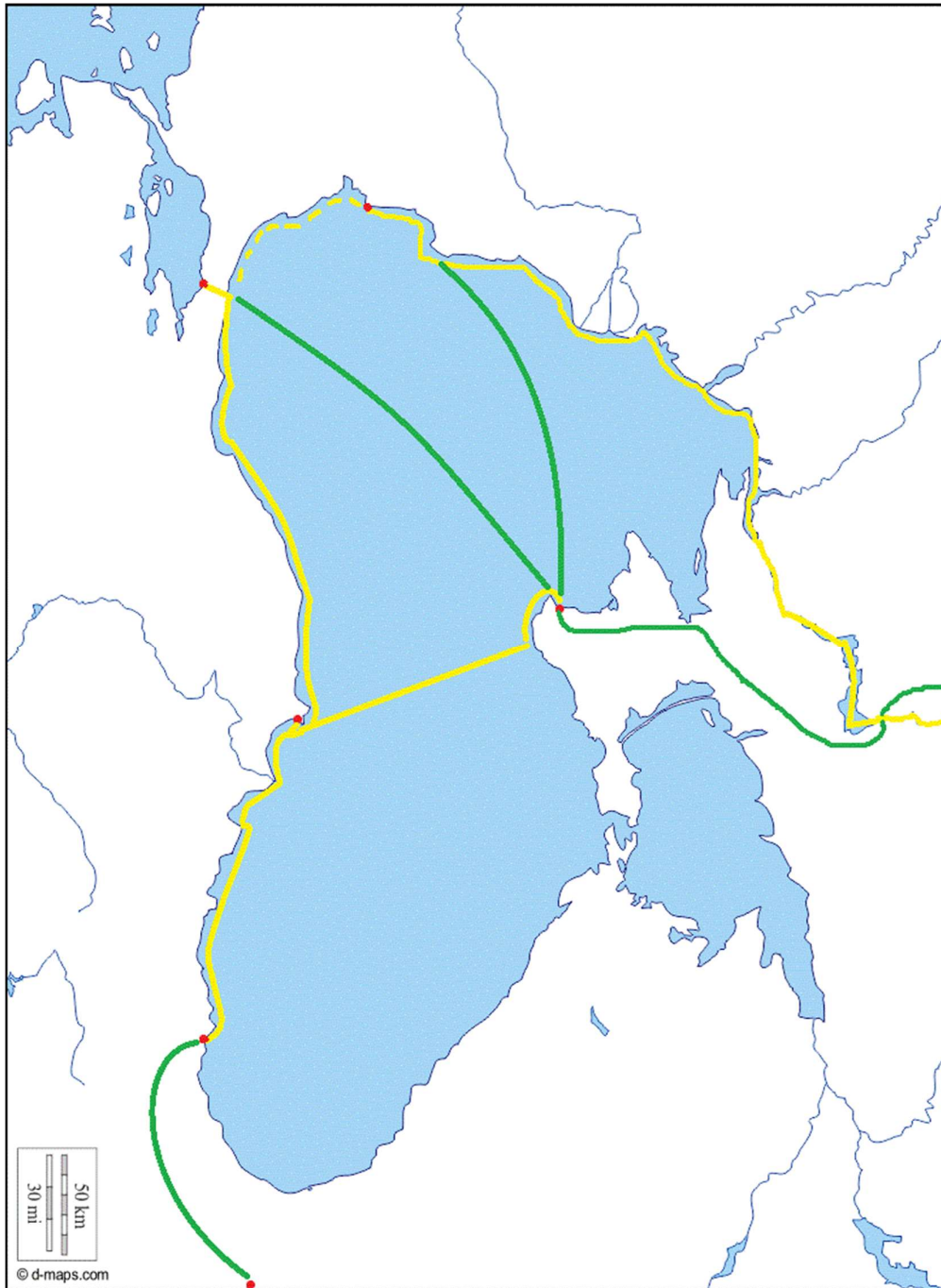
Original from The European Environment: State and Outlook 2010 – Soil, available at <https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer/2010/europe/soil>.

5 – Euxine Winds and Currents



Red arrows show the two most significant currents in the Black Sea; Green arrows show the prevailing winds.

6 - Trade Routes, Known and Hypothesized.



Discussion of these traderoutes can be found in Chapter 3.

Yellow trade routes are attested in the sources; green trade routes are those hypothesized in the thesis – two open-water routes between Cherson and Constantinople; an overland route between Rus' and Kiev, and a grain connection between Trebizond and Tbilisi (slightly off-map).

(NB the dotted section of the yellow route between Mesembria and Constantinople omitted by Porphyrogenetos, but seems a logically consistent continuation of the Rus' voyage.)

APPENDIX 2 – Rhōsia and Matracha Clause – variations.

A

Item mementote diligenter pro hac ultima et maxima conventionione postulare quod in tota terra imperii sui quam habet vel habebit de cetero deitate propicia ipse vel qui post eum imperatores erunt januenses vel aliquis de districut eorum nullum drictum commodam habeant facultatem mercandi et utendi libere per omnem terram et omnes partes imperii et etiam exercendi negociationem pannorum sete apud stivam sicut veneti solit erant et eundi ad matracam et per omnia simili modo gaudeant privilegiis et indulctis omnibus quemadmodum et veneti faciebant.

Instructions to Amico Di Murta, attached to the 1155 agreement. This is the first mention of Matracha.

Nuova Serie 348.

B

ἵνα δέ ἔχωσιν ἐπ’ ἀδείας τά γενουῖτιχα πλοῖα πραγματεύεσθαι ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὀπουδήποτε χώπαις τῆς βασιλείας μου, ἄνευ τῆς Ῥωσίας καὶ τῶν Ματράχων, εἰ μὴ ἴσως ῥητῶς ἔστιν, ὅτε καὶ τοῦτο ἐκχωρηθῆ τούτοις παρὰ τῆς βασιλείας μου.

Extract from 1169 Chrysobull of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos to the Genoese, as preserved in the 1192 Chrysobull granted by Emperor Isaac II Angelos to the Genoese.

M&M, 35. L. 30-34.

C

Possint vero Genuensia navigia segura negotiari in omnibus ubicumque regionibus dominationis meae praeter Russiam et Matracham, nisi forte expresse hoc etiam concessum illis fuerit a maiestate mea.

Extract from 1169 Chrysobull of Emperor Manuel I Komnenos to the Genoese, as preserved in the 1192 Chrysobull granted by Emperor Isaac II Angelos to the Genoese. Nuova Serie, 432.

D

Habebunt autem et licentiam genuensium naves negotiari in omnibus usque regionibus absque rossia et matracha nisi forte signanter contingat quod et hoc permittitur eis ab imperio eius.

(Extract from the first version of the 1169 Chrysobull granted by Manuel I Komnenos to the Genoese. Nuova Serie, 355.)

E

Habebunt vero potestatem naves ianuensium negociari in omnibus terris ubicumque voluerint preter in Rusiam et in matica [*sic*] nisi forte ab eius imperio specialiter hoc fuerint eis concessum.

(Extract from second version of the 1169 Chrysobull granted by Manuel I Komnenos to the Genoese. Nuova Serie, 360.)

(N.B. the third version of the 1169 Chrysobull does not contain any Rhōsia and Matracha clause; however, it appears incomplete, as it is missing much of the latter half of the text, rather than being an alternative version. *Nuova Serie*, 361-4.)

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M&M = Miklosich, Frank, and Joseph Müller, eds. *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi Sacra et Profana*. Vol 3. Athens: Spanos Editions, 1996.

Nuova Serie = Sanguinenti, Angelo, and Geralmo Bertolotto, 'Nuova serie di documenti sulle Relazioni de Genova coll'Impero Buzantino, raccolti dal Con Angelo Sanguinenti e pubblicati con molte aggiunte dal prof. Geralmo Bertolotto'. *Atti della società Ligure di Storia Patria* 28 (1846): 339-577.

SRTD = Scandinavian Runic-Text Database. 'Rundata.info Web Client'. Last modified February 9 2014. <https://rundata.info/>.

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